The trouble with the contemporary condition of our modern civilization of our modern civilization is that it has stopped questioning itself. Not asking certain questions is pregnant with more dangers than failing to answer the questions already on the official agenda, while asking the wrong kind of questions all too often helps to avert the eyes from the truly important issues. The price of silence is paid in the hard currency of human suffering. Asking the right questions makes, after all, all the difference between fate and destination, drifting and traveling. Questioning the ostensibly unquestionable premise of our life is arguably the most urgent of the services we owe our fellow human beings and ourselves.

Cornelius Castordadis

University of Alberta

Playing the Field of Choice:

Active Parents and Edmonton Public Schools' Alternative Pedagogical Programs

by

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Abstract

School choice schemes are based on the market logic of rational choice theory where all participants are presumed to be endowed with equal information and ability to navigate the system. In an effort to define the upper limits of agency, this study examines the perceptions and practices of parents who are very active in their child's education. Two pedagogical programs were chosen from Edmonton Public Schools; one traditional, teacher directed program and one progressive, student led program. Nine parents were interviewed and surveyed and their perceptions and practices were compared and contrasted. This is resulted in several findings which indicated that active parents were uninformed and inconsistent. They found the choice process difficult and in some cases actively worked to restrict access to the program. Ultimately, discrimination was naturalized and legitimized under this system of provision and the district was found to be primary in exacerbating structural inequalities in the public education system.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

> *Our collective loss of faith in the common school is perhaps one of the most significant shifts in educational thought during this century* (Callan, 1997, p. 162).

Over the last few decades, educational debate in North America has focused in part on the market driven reform of school choice. The dispute is defined by those who advocate a publicly funded system of provision, open to all, versus those who support a form of regulated market where provision is administered according to specialization (Callan, 1997). Educational choice has gathered momentum around the world through economic globalization discourses (Ball, 1993, Ball, 1998; Brantlinger, 2003; Hargreaves, 1994; Mintrom, 2000), thus positioning it as a central feature of political, economic and global reform.

Choice Proponents

While proponents often employ market rhetoric of competition and increased standards to support school choice, they also utilize an ethical argument, citing equity and pluralism as grounds for the development of school markets. They argue that educational choice is more equitable than community schools since parents will no longer be required to "choose by mortgage" which school their children attend (Chubb & Moe, 1990) and assert that educational fragmentation is necessary because "any single institution that attempts to embrace the pluralism of the larger society will be oppressive and coercive toward somebody or other" (Callan, 1997, p. 161). Thus, this argument frames private preference as a more socially just system of provision and common schooling as an anachronistic failed ideal.

Choice Critics

Conversely, critics raise political concerns, doubting the abilities of a segregated system to produce citizens able to participate in a pluralistic democracy (Callan, 1997; Brantlinger, 2003; Adnett & Davis, 2002). They also assert that since ability to choose is unevenly distributed, school markets amplify existing inequalities and ignore concerns for social justice (Ball, 2003; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995; Brantlinger, 2003; Reay, 1998; David & Ball, 2003; Woods, Power & Halpin, 1998; Garminikow & Green, 2003). Thus, many of the critiques of school markets are also critiques of rational choice theory because proponents assume it is the process parents use when looking for schools for their children (Bosetti, 2004). The premise that "parents are utility maximizers who make decisions from clear value preferences based on calculations of the costs, benefits and probabilities of success of various options" (Bosetti 2004, p. 388) assumes that parents will have equal knowledge and ability to choose, "schools will become more ethnically and socially mixed…[and that] markets will drive up school performance," (Lauder, Hughes & Watson, 1999, p. 87). This thinking also presupposes that all pertinent information is available, that each educational option shares equal parity of esteem with all other options and most importantly, that parents are in fact rational actors capable of making informed and ethical decisions within the restrictions afforded them by the system of provision. It is with this in mind that this study attempts, as one of its goals, to illustrate the limitations of the rational choice paradigm.

Differences in Choice Sites

Since policy development does not "move smoothly from one nation, region or local area to the next due to geography, demography and history of school provision" (Glatter, Woods & Bagley, 1997, p. 8), there are some divergent findings in the research. For example, Neild (2005) found U.S. high school students in affluent neighbourhoods were more likely to attend their local school, whereas in New Zealand students from low SES backgrounds were more likely to attend their neighbourhood school. (Lauder et al., 1999, p. 92). In the UK, Waslander and Thrupp (1995) found that lower income families were less likely to attempt entrance to 'high circuit schools.' Given the sheer number of social and structural influences in the functioning of a given education market, including history, housing, economy, cultural norms, educational policies such as funding, boundaries, diversity of provision and role of parents, it is not surprising that generalizations across sites can be problematic. However, comparisons between sites can prove useful, and thus it is essential that all school markets be thoroughly studied in an effort to determine what effect various attributes have in the operation and outcomes of a given market.

Why Edmonton?

There are several elements of Edmonton's public school quasi-market that distinguish it from others. For instance, Hamilton and Guin (2005) posit that where parents in the United Sates lack academic or teacher quality information; they may use "race, ethnicity and average student SES as proxies for school quality" (p. 45). In

Alberta, school performance and achievement data are arguably the most accessible piece of formal information regarding individual schools since they are published in newspapers, available on the district website and provided to parents at every school in the province, enhancing the market ideal of competition and providing a seemingly neutral measure in contrast to race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES). Secondly, where many studies have taken place in markets with a limited range of choice, such as public and private (Davies, 2006; Reay, David & Ball, 2005; Bosetti, 2004), or in sites that restrict choice to the secondary school level (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Thrupp, 1999; Reay, David & Ball, 2005), Edmonton's quasi-market is relatively unique in the vast degree of diversity it offers, particularly at the elementary level. In this way, the breadth of Edmonton's market affects every public school student. Thirdly, many school choice schemes are recent initiations (Brigham, DaCosta & Peters, 2003; Dehli, 1996; VanDunk & Dickman, 2003), but Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) has operated with open boundaries since 1973, and site-based management since 1980 (EPSB History Website). As a result, Edmonton can safely be described as an 'established' market (Gorard, 1999). These unique attributes may in part be the reason that Edmonton is frequently cited as a model for school districts around the world and across Canada (Emery Dosdal, 2001; Maguire 2006). The school district's website states: "Edmonton Public Schools is recognized internationally for offering the curriculum in ways that complement the unique backgrounds and talents of our students" (EPSB website). The Heritage Foundation website describes EPSB's influence:

> Edmonton's education system has become a model for education reformers across the

> United States. Various reforms inspired by Edmonton's schools have been implemented in cities like Houston, Oakland and Seattle. Policy makers in many other cities, including
> Washington, DC, are also exploring similar reform (Heritage.Org website).

Since little is known about the effects of Edmonton's choice scheme, it is somewhat surprising that it should be held as an exemplar for other sites. Relying on the platitudes of 'parental satisfaction' research (Bosetti, 2004; Brigham et al., 2006) ignores the complexities of school markets. The critical research that has been done points to choice contributing to increased racial segregation. In an interview with a high school principal two high schools were described in the following way:

> One of the things going against [High School A] is that we don't have a lot of kids in that area. But nonetheless we should be able to attract some students there. So we did [introduce dance and cadet programs]…[High School B] has a very large Arab population…it seems to me over the past five years there has been an increase within the population toward more fundamentalist tendencies. And for whatever reason, that seems to be curtailing a lot of people from choosing it as their local high schools of choice (Interview 17, July 2002) (Taylor, 2003, p. 620).

Given its maturity, breadth of choice and international stature, Edmonton's school quasi-market emerges as an important object of examination, yet remains largely under-studied.

Why Active Parents?

Educational policy has been concerned primarily with pressuring *schools* to change through competition induced by formula funding, open boundaries and public reporting of achievement results. Research has been concerned primarily with the outcomes of such policies, such as the level of segregation and standards. However, a gap remains in the literature regarding how these policies have changed *parent* behaviour. New standards of parental responsibility have been established which stress the importance of participating in every aspect of their childrens' schooling. Some scholars

suggest that parent involvement is no longer optional (Walker & MacLure, 1999; Edwards & Warin, 1999), describing the collaboration between families and schools as "the colonization of the home by the school" (Reay, 2005, p. 25). This sentiment was likely raised in response to the 1999 UK white paper *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 1997), where parent-school agreements were made mandatory, effectively contractually binding parents to take an active role in the education of their children. Such agreements have also been described as "protocols for policing parent and child compliance with professional values" (Vincent, 1996, p. 49) and as a mechanism for selecting not only students but also the "right sort of parents" (Gewirtz et al., 1995, p. 163). In 2000, British researchers J. Ouston and S. Hood conducted a national survey of parents, teachers, administrators and pupils and found that not only do home-school contracts do little to improve the relationship between schools and families, but have little impact on parents who are already removed from the school (Walker & MacLure, 1999).

The flip side of this development is the notion that where parents are empowered to choose their child's school, they will be motivated to learn more about and actively participate in their child's education (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003). From this perspective, choice schemes were intended to improve schools' responsiveness and stimulate family involvement either "through the leverage of their right to leave if their needs and desires are not satisfied" (Howell & Peterson, 2006, p. 115) or by availing themselves of new opportunities for participation in the governance of the school. The provincial department of education followed this direction. By:

> …maintaining a focus on the agenda of parental involvement and choice, the Alberta government addressed the need for more choice in the development of its business plans (Alberta Education, 1995b, 1997, 1999).

However, the objectives outlined in the education business plans gradually changed over time.

> The goals articulated in these plans progressed from increased opportunity for parent choice to involvement in governance and then to responsiveness to parents (Rittman, 2001, p. 4).

Although choosing is necessarily active and imposes information-gathering costs on any parents considering their child's education, it is often the case that parental activity extends well beyond the initial decision of school.

> We are entering into a 'third wave'... which is neither part of a final drive to 'meritocracy,' nor the result of a socialist victory for educational reform. To date, the 'third wave' has been characterized by the rise of the educational parentocracy, where a child's education is increasingly dependent on the wealth and wishes of parents rather than the ability and efforts of pupils... the ideology of parentocracy involves a major program of educational privatization under the slogan of 'parental choice,' educational standards" and the 'free market' (Brown, 1990, p. 66-67).

Because Edmonton Public School's philosophy is "success at school begins at home" (EPSB website), parents are encouraged to play a significant role in the schooling of their children. Therefore, EPSB is an appropriate site to investigate the behaviour of active parents since its system of provision boasts not only a broad range of opportunities for parental involvement such as, school councils and educational/ business partnerships) but also the possibility for deeper involvement through the Parents as Partners program, where parents meet with district personnel and school board trustees three times a year. Parents on an alternative program advisory board also have the opportunity to meet regularly with district personnel (EPSB Website). However, it may be that current choice policies don't account for the "dangers some kinds of parental involvement pose to pupils' equal opportunities for educational resources" (Reay, 2005, p. 25).

Parents and Power

Some researchers suggest that active parents may not only determine much of their own children's education, but that of others as well (Adnett & Davies, 2002; Brantlinger, 2003; Reay, 2005). Where equal access to information for low-income, immigrant and minority parents is a concern, Hamilton and Guin (2005) proposed that such apprehension is unnecessary since a small number of active parents may induce schools to positive educational changes on behalf of all parents.

> ...some scholars argue that in order for school choice to produce competitive benefits, not all parents need to make informed choices. Competition can be generated through a small subset of well-informed parents who exert pressure on all schools to improve and to promote the outcomes those parents value. Such marginal consumers engage in choice behaviour that create incentives for schools to improve for all students. They also tend to be more involved in their children's schools, which may further increase the pressure schools face to respond to their wishes (p. 48).

Of course some parents are likely to promote outcomes *they* value, which offers no guarantee that broader public goals, such as the ability to participate in a deliberative democracy, will be met. For example, Reay (2005) found parental concerns often to be "narrow and aimed at gaining advantage for their own children (p. 91). Thus, if the range of preferences are unequally distributed among active and "inactive" parents, then schools will be encouraged to bias their provision and programming in favour of some parents at the expense of others (Adnett & Davies, 2002; Taylor & Mackay, 2008). Both of these positions are contested by Manna (1999) who questions whether or not active parents do in fact influence or have any effect on school improvement. It is difficult however, to dismiss the idea that through their 'choice work' of visiting schools, gathering information, meeting entrance criteria and more, active parents become

connected in some way to the "ruling relations of the educational institution" (Andre-Bechely, 2005, p. 24). For this reason, investigating who such parents are is vital to the discussion of parent activity in quasi-markets.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The preceding discussion suggests the need to look more closely at parental choice. The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the possibilities and limitations afforded parents in Edmonton's established quasi-market and to illuminate the choice work parents carry out. I explore rational choice theory by examining the degree to which the most active parents gather information and calculate their initial decision as well as the relationship between information and school choice in general. In an effort to define the upper limits of agency in a relatively 'open' school quasi-market such as Edmonton's, my inquiry has focused on the behaviour of very active parents as well as on the implications of such behaviour.

The research was guided by the following questions:

- How do active parents engage in the market?
- Why do they send their children to particular alternative programs?
- What informs their decision? E.g. past experience with schools (their own or their child's)
- How do they view their role in their child's education?
  How do they participate in the school/district?
- What resources do active parents draw on in the schooling of their children
- What are the implications for their children and other people's children? For the district/ public education system as a whole? For the general public and political climate?

By outlining the practices of these parents, my objective is three-fold: first, to elucidate the way in which choice policies have effected parent behaviour and impacted

upon their daily lives, second, to investigate the particular way their practices are tied to the operation and maintenance of power within the quasi-market and third, to extrapolate the feasibility of other parents equally engaging in the market.

Why Ergo Sum and Carob Hill?

My focus in this study is on active parent choosers. Both the Ergo Sum and Carob Hill[1]

programs are pedagogical alternatives; Ergo Sum is traditional and teacher-directed whereas Carob Hill is democratic and student-directed. Although these two alternative programs are at opposite ends of the pedagogical spectrum, they have a number of structural similarities that prove useful to the aims of this study: For example, whereas much of the literature on school choice has focused on secondary education (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Reay, David & Ball, 2005; Thrupp, 1999) these two programs are representative of Edmonton's wide assortment of educational options at the elementary level. Secondly, both programs have an admissions process and therefore require active choice. Both alternative program parent societies have negotiated with the board for a significant amount of influence over the functioning of their respective programs, which may have attracted parents interested in considerable input into their child's school. Both Ergo Sum and Carob Hill require parental commitment to their child's education and so reveal the possibility for choice work to be ongoing. This feature also ensures not only that the parents involved in these programs can easily be considered 'active' (as this study sets out to investigate), they could also be considered the *most* active. The Genesis program, founded on the same principles as Ergo Sum, but with an added Christian

[1] Ergo Sum, Carob Hill and Genesis are pseudonyms

element, is the only other alternative program in the district for which parent involvement is a requisite condition for admission. Finally, since many critics raise concerns about the role of cultural reproduction of social classes in school quasi-markets (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Ball 2003; Brantlinger, 2003; Garminikow & Green, 2003; Thrupp, 1999; Reay, 1998; David & Ball, 2003; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995; Woods, Power & Halpin 1998), studying these pedagogically based alternatives could further illuminate the specific social elements very active parents hope to reproduce in choosing their child's school.

Positioning Myself

My interest in school markets stems both from my childhood and from my work as a teacher. I grew up in a diverse community in Edmonton, and although open boundaries were in place, most children still attended their community school. As a result, I attended school with children from a wide array of racial, cultural and SES backgrounds. Each of us saw how the other lived and learned and from each other beyond the academic goals of schooling. Although I do not believe that public education alone can undo social inequities, I do believe that it can play a crucial role in the lives of disadvantaged children and provide an environment for working towards collective harmony and equal opportunity.

As a beginning teacher I became disenchanted with the way educational provision varied according to neighbourhood, where lower SES schools focus on basic literacy skills and high SES areas focus on critical thinking. These distinctions in school focus appeared to me to be blatant power differentials justified both by middle-class teachers and district officials as meeting the particular "needs" of each community. I chose to

investigate school choice and active parents in order to better understand the etiology and origins of power in Edmonton's school quasi-market.

Guiding Principles

Two overarching assumptions impact this research. The first is that education is and should continue to be provided as a public good (Stein, 2001). Since "Edmonton's public and Catholic districts….serve 95% of the city's 130,000 students" (Maguire, 2006, p. v), both of which are "fully-funded," education in this context is firmly cemented as a public good. Although parents are ultimately responsible for the development of their children, public education is provided by the broader population through taxes, and as such, should serve everyone's interests by fulfilling its potential to create social cohesion and a healthy political culture among varied groups of people. Although there is no shortage of evidence that exposes both the symbolic and concrete violence that the goal of "social cohesion" has wrought upon groups such as First Nations people, African Canadians and the poor, the potential to rectify these injustices and create a more equitable system remains not only possible and desirable, but necessary for the greater good (Winks, 1969; Katz, 1976; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Simon, 1984; Simmons, 1996; Borrows, 1999; Youngblood Henderson, 2000).

This leads to the second assumption that all children are entitled to an education that has equal parity with all other forms of education. Streaming children according to ability and specialization beginning when they are four years old places children in a clearly defined educational hierarchy not conducive to the aims of social justice, or egalitarian principles of democracy (Callan, 199; Reay, 1998; Brantlinger, 2003; Garminikow & Green, 2003; Oakes, 2005). To be clear, I am not advocating cultural

assimilation or the homogenization of children, but rather the development of commonalities, able to support negotiation of diverse interests as we aspire to a more democratic world.

Chapter Outline

This study is presented in five parts: introduction, literature review, theoretical concepts, methodology, analysis and discussion. Chapter two, the literature review presents the findings of influential studies from English speaking industrialized nations around the world, including the United Kingdom (UK), The United States (US), New Zealand, Australia and Canada. I begin with a brief history of relevant policies followed by a short evaluation of common arguments in support of school choice. I also investigate findings related to the role of socioeconomic status (SES), race and gender on the functioning of school markets and highlight 'choice work' as the labour of mothers in particular. Most of the chapter is spent reviewing both the process of choosing a school and the effects of school choice.

In the third chapter, I outline the theoretical concepts that influence the analysis of the study. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is used as a way of addressing the structure-agency binary within school choice. I review his notions of social exclusion, cultural reproduction, field and capital in an effort to demonstrate how parents' practices not only inform but are also informed by the social field.

The fourth chapter speaks to the methodology used in this study by explaining how the sample was comprised, how data was collected, and which methods of analysis

were used. Then I review the limitations, reliability and ethics of the research and end with reflection on the process.

There are three chapters in the fifth section of the study that analyze interview data. In chapter five, drawing on Bourdieu's notion of the field, I examine what informs parents' decisions, including past experiences and structural limitations, such as available information, Board policy and admissions criteria. In the same chapter I use Bourdieu's concept of habitus to interpret why parents choose to send their children to pedagogical alternatives. In chapter six, I look at parental practices and how parents view their role in educating their child, including defining themselves and their children and controlling access of 'others' to the program. Finally I explore the variety of capitals mothers bring to the choice system.

In chapter eight I review and synthesize the key findings. This is followed by a brief discussion that raises questions about the implications of parent behaviour on the operation of the school choice schemes.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

I intend to focus specifically on the practices and perceptions of active parents in school markets, however it is important to locate that aim within the broader school choice debate. In order to position this project both historically and as part of a global political movement, this literature review will focus on research from New Zealand, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom with an emphasis on what is known about school choice in Alberta.

Choice Proponents

Understanding the positioning of parents in school choice schemes requires a closer investigation of the social and political contexts of such systems. Fueled by the pressures of increasing globalization and anxiety about potential losses in the global market due to incompetent workers, educational crisis campaigns were common to the development of school markets around the world. Claims that falling standards, lax discipline and out of control spending plagued public education systems were made by media and conservative governments in England (Ball, Kenny & Gardiner, 1990), Australia (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997), the US (Chubb & Moe, 1990) and Canada (Nikiforuk, 1993; Dehli, 1996). Since then, statistical evidence indicates that literacy rates are not declining (Bracey, 1997; Rothstein, 1999; Baron, 2000), and that economic difficulties are not related to ill-prepared workers (Noddings, 1995; Kenway, 1998; Berliner, 2000). However, such derisive discourses provided a rationale for education reforms while diverting attention from economic issues. For example, despite

increasing educational attainment rates in the US, jobs offering sustainable salaries are decreasing (Wilson, 1996).

Advocating for the transfer of control from the public to the private sector is fundamental to the aims of neo-liberalism, a "neo-classical-influenced economic theory and right-wing libertarian political philosophy which claims that government control over the economy is inefficient, corrupt or otherwise undesirable" (neoliberalism website). Thus, neoliberalism supports market development in all areas of society. However, neoliberalism is not just an economic model, but also an all-encompassing moral and social ideology, which promotes competition and individualism. Chubb and Moe (1990) assert that the privatization of education will eliminate political bureaucracy in schools and raise standards through competition brought about through greater choice, thus making schools more responsive to the demands of parents. The market-based rationale that choice increases standards asserts that because schools are allocated money on a per student basis, schools that have superior exam results will attract more students and be rewarded with increased funding, and unsuccessful schools must improve or face closure (Gewirtz et al. 1995).

Choice Critics

This logic is contested by other writers. First, as schools improve by changing their intakes, other schools are left with more disadvantaged students, and become stigmatized. The result is a 'spiral of decline' (Ball, 1990). Second, if capable students gravitate to better performing schools, this may be detrimental to the overall improvement of all students since the gains from an equal mix of high and low ability

students will be lost (Thrupp, 1999; Brantlinger, 2003). Third, large studies have found that the school itself has little or no impact on student achievement and that student progress is largely attributable to student background (Gorard, Taylor & Fitz, 2003). Gorard et al. (2003) conclude that, "school based choice policies are unlikely to raise standards of attainment and certainly are not going to be as effective as social policies that tackle important issues, such as poverty" (p. 28).

Global Advancement of Neo-Liberalism

The timeline below is provided in order to position this study both historically and as part of a global political movement. The focus is on policies from New Zealand, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Alberta in an effort to demonstrate the "policy borrowing" between nations and illustrate school choice as a symptom of the global advancement of neo-liberal governance.

Key Choice Policies Around the Globe

1974	Edmonton Public Schools (EPS) implements open boundaries
1982	EPS will not permit the development of religious alternatives on the grounds that "our universal system of education can only be weakened by religious fragmentation
1988	*Education Reform Act* (UK) – authorizing charter schools, national testing, open attendance areas and school based management. Inspired US's charter school movement.
	The Education Act (New Zealand) – intended to extend choice to disadvantaged families, but ultimately worked against them. Every school regulated to become a charter school with school based budgeting and hiring and firing of teaching personel.

Schools were 'able' to purchase private services and borrow money as required.

The School Act (Alberta) – allowed for the development of alternative programs that emphasized a particular language, culture, religion or subject matter.
Nine Alternative programs available in EPS (2006-07 Alternative Programs Administrator's Handbook).

1994 *Alberta Charter School Legislation*- transportation funds removed

1995 *Alberta Education's First Business Plan* – ERA reforms cited and appear in AB Business plan, including provisions for the development of charter schools (Matsumoto – ATA Website)

1996 All Australian schools regulated to become charter schools. Schools reduced from 2 000 to 1 664. Teaching staff reduced by 20%.

22 Alternative programs available in Edmonton Public Schools (EPS)

Equity

Since the argument of increased standards through choice is difficult to prove, equity emerges as the primary issue of contention in the functioning of school markets. Proponents of choice assert that as a capitalistic and democratic praxis, everyone has an *equal right* to choose, whereas critics retort that not everyone is *equally able* to choose within a market-based system. Since both critics (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Lauder et al., 1999; Ball, 2003; Gorard et al., 2003) and proponents of school choice schemes (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Bosetti, 2004; Brigham et al., 2006) position their arguments relative to equality, defining equity and its accurate assessment emerges as central to the discussion of school quasi-markets. A variety of measures for this task are used throughout the research, ranging from process measurements, such as accessing information and

transportation, to outcome measurements such as segregation. Many studies concerned with outcome-based measurements indicate that school choice does in fact favour the middle classes (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Waslander &Thrupp, 1995; Woods, Power & Halpin, 1998; Lauder et al., 1999; Ball, 2003; Beundia, Ares, Juarez & Percy, 2004) and increases racial and class segregation (Tomlinson 1997; Lauder et al. 1999). Taylor (2002) and Gorard et al. (2003) in the UK and Waslander and Thrupp (2003) in New Zealand support these studies, finding that socio-economic segregation between schools would have been smaller if all students had attended their local schools.

At times, using a variety of measures to determine equity in school quasi-markets has resulted in contradictory findings. Although all of these researchers agree that socio-economic segregation between schools would be smaller if all students attended their local school, they differ in their opinions as to precisely why and how this occurs. Taylor posits that the more constraints placed on the market by the Local Education Authority (LEA) through such mechanisms as admissions procedures and lack of diverse provisions, the more likely it is that schools become more socially polarized and segregated (Taylor, 2002), whereas Gorard et al. (2003) warn that "where diversity increases, so too does segregation" (p. 122). This contradiction may be the result of the authors' differing conceptions of 'diversity' since Gorard et al. (2003) specify that "only offering diversity through 'private' and therefore exclusionary means" (p. 122) leads to increased segregation. Perhaps Taylor (2002), who doesn't elaborate on his definition of diversity, envisions a choice system that offers equal but different forms of provision. Because measurements of equity are contingent on many factors that vary from site to site, school markets should be considered contextually within their own local, historical

and cultural circumstances (Gewirtz et al., 2003). That said, numerous similarities may be found in the ways in which educational markets have been implemented and in how they function in industrialized English-speaking nations.

Globalization and School Choice

Since the late 1980s, educational choice policies have proliferated across the globe. Devolution, formula funding, increased normative testing, and often, published exam results accompany school quasi-markets around the world. These reforms are arguably part of an ideological and political shift away from the post World War II welfare state toward current neo-liberal practices.

1988 can be viewed as a pivotal year since that is when many key policies reflecting a neo-liberal ideology were implemented such as the *North American Free Trade Agreement* and Margaret Thatcher's *Education Reform Act* (ERA) in the UK. The ERA authorized charter schools, a national curriculum, national testing, open attendance areas and school-based management. Similar reforms appeared later in 1995, in Alberta Education's Business Plan (Matsumoto, 1995, ATA website) and served as an an inspiration to the US's charter school movement (Woods et al., 1998). Also in 1988, *The Education Act* was implemented in New Zealand, which was intended to focus on low-income and Maori families, but ultimately worked against them since devolving the budget was quickly followed by less government funding (Brigham et al., 2003). Competition among schools also increased, creating even greater ethnic and socio-economic segregation, because Māori parents were "less likely than Pākehā parents to get their first choice of school for their child" (Wylie, 2008). Although the changes that took

place in New Zealand didn't occur in Australia until 1996, there were important similarities. The change to charter schools in both countries was likened to that of an earthquake since every school in both countries was regulated to become a charter school (Brigham et al., 2006). This meant that every public school was directed to establish a Board of Trustees comprised of an administrator, five parents and one teacher, which was made responsible for the school budget as well as the hiring and firing of teaching personnel. Since schools were also 'able' to purchase private services and borrow money as they required, members of the business community were also eligible for membership on the boards (Brigham et al., 2006).

Rational Choice

> *Choosing well is difficult and most decisions have several different dimensions. Most good decisions will involve these steps:*
>
> - *Figure out your goals*
> - *Evaluate the importance of each goal*
> - *Array the options*
> - *Evaluate how likely each of the options is to meet your goals*
> - *Pick the winning option* (Swartz, 2005, p. 48)

Even Chubb and Moe (1990) acknowledge that school markets are "inevitably subject to all sorts of real-world imperfections, and one of these is that consumers may be too poorly informed to make choices that are truly in their best interests" (p. 34). Yet the problem of inadequate information is only one weakness in the theory of rational choice.

While it might be true that the fewer structural restrictions imposed on parents, the greater their ability is to make a beneficial and rational decision for their child (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003), this solution doesn't take into account that "when parents make individually rational decisions for their own children, it can potentially produce

collectively irrational outcomes" (Stein, 2001, p. 33). In this light, when guided by market doctrine of competition and choice, educational policies can structure provision such that a child's educational potential and her family resources go hand in hand.

Rational choice theory privileges individual agency, but the ability to be 'agentic' arguably varies. For example, educational choice for mothers across divisions of class and 'race' divisions has actually been experienced as greater structural restriction (Reay, 1998). This indicates that in many cases, structural elements that create inequity and risk cannot be overcome, even by the most fastidious exertion of agency. Further, school hierarchies, admissions criteria, zoning, systems of information, social classes, transportation policies, gender and race are all structural elements that have considerable influence in the functioning of educational markets (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Hamilton & Guin, 2005; Maguire, 2006) and at the same time work to expose the market logic of agency as a luxury afforded those with the resources and abilities to navigate these structural elements

Who is to Blame?

It is no surprise that many critics (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Tomlinson, 1997; Beundia, 2004; Neild, 2005; Andre-Bechely, 2005) emphasize the "influence of educational institutions… in a way which downplays the agency of pupils and their families" (Reay 1997, p. 195). Brantlinger (2003) however draws on Bourdieu among other theorists including, Gramsci, Eagleton, and Apple to suggest that institutional structures and practices, which create and maintain social stratification are the result of "intention and informed agency" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 3). Brantlinger (2003) further

argues that such structures are durable precisely because they "correspond to influential people's desires and hence from their power to create and retain them" (p. 3). This work points to the need for scholars, journalists and the general public to "challenge the exemplary status attributed to middle-class parents' educational values and goals, and support for education and involvement with schools (p. 59).

Although Brantlinger points to the hegemony of middle class ideals as a destructive force in the lives of other people's children, she is also careful to point out that governing bodies responsible for the development and failure of policy (e.g. government officials and school district personnel) are also accountable for the harm done to lower-income and minority children. Research examining the experiences and perceptions of marginalized children in a stratified school systems reveals that as a result of a ranked system of provision, these students believe they are less intelligent and less deserving of advanced school placement and better school outcomes than their middle class counterparts (Brantlinger, 1993; Carlson, 1999, 2002; Graue, Kroeger & Prager, 2001; Dibos, 2002). In this way, neo-liberal governance has restructured the public realm by naturalizing individualization, competition and risk, creating the appearance that those who make poor choices are the creators of their own hardship. Andre-Bechely (2005) investigates the relationship between educational institutions and parents by examining how parents become complicit in the inequitable outcomes for other parents' children simply by making what they believe is the best decision for their own children.

PARENT PROFILES
Women's Work: Choice and Subjugation analysis?

While most research analyzing parent behaviours centers on differential access of information as it relates to SES (Moe, 2001; Ball, 2003; Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003; Hamilton & Guin, 2005), some critical feminist writers have investigated the way in which social relations and institutional organization intersect with and inform the lived experiences of mothers (Smith, 1987; David, West & Ribbens, 1994; Reay, 1998; Andre-Bechely, 2005). David et al. (1994) explore the boundaries between home and school and investigate the perspective of mothers across class boundaries when confronted with compulsory schooling for their children. Ribbens (1994) found that mothers experience profound contradiction when schooling demands a "dramatic shift over night in their maternal responsibilities" (p. 59) and that overall they felt powerless in their ability to control the lives of their children within the state bureaucracy. In an analysis of choice policies, Ribbens (1994) points out that in Western industrialized societies such policies center on the initial choice of school and do not extend to allow parental influence in other aspects of their child's experience while attending that school. Ribbens' (1994) work outlines the specific activities mothers across class lines engage in, in relation to their primary school children's education such as maintaining intricate social networks and sharing the labour of child care by rotating 'pick-ups' and 'drop-offs.' She finds that both working class and middle-class mothers engaged with discourses of "consumerism" and "back to basics" (Reay, 1998, p. 202) to make sense of their role in their children's schooling. Where class does inform mothers' experiences is in their ability to operate individually and organize collectively to guarantee their childrens' preparation for elite school entrance exams. Other feminist work has considered the way in which choice has

acted to constrict mothers in their lives with children (Connell, 1987, 1998; David et al., 1997; Reay, 2005) and connects capitalist exploitation and paternalism with the subordination and domestication of women.

Mother's With Power

> What seems intuitively clear, however, is how much more extensive the responsibilities of motherhood are becoming as motherhood moves from appearing to be an intimate, private and personal responsibility to being performed as a public and profoundly political responsibility at all levels within education (David, 2005, p. 20)

Contrasting the research that positions women as passive subjects is work that acknowledges the agency of parental power and its uneven distribution among mothers. Reay (1998) reveals the central role women play in the process. "Women far more than men appear to be the agents of social reproduction" (p. 205). Other work (Atkinson, 1985; Connell, 1987; Fraser, 1989; Collins, 1992) points more specifically to the way in which women "negotiate family status within modern institutions" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 58). Whereas earlier theories looked at the doxic adherence of marginalized groups to explain the reproduction of the class system, Brantlinger (2003) looks to the perceptions of the middle class with high levels of educational attainment. Interestingly, all of the middle-class mothers interviewed in Reay (1998) perceived the inequities in the education system as existing between the state and private sector. They believed that paying tuition bought success for children and alleviated a mother's obligation to exert an "enormous investment of …time and energy" (p. 204). By neglecting to see their role in perpetuating inequities within the state sector, by "monopolizing the best neighbourhoods, schools, and courses" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 20), these mothers constructed themselves as disadvantaged, and were ignorant of the effect their behaviour

may have on other, less-powerful mothers (an area that Reay (1998) suggests for further study). Other work has revealed similar indications that mothers were unaware of the extent of their power and influence or of their children's relative advantages (Brantlinger, 2003; Delpit, 1988). Part of this may be attributed to the fact that many dominant mothers professed to ascribe to liberal philosophies of equity and justice, and in so doing concealed even to themselves their self-interests. On the other side, Delpit (1988) found that those without power were very conscious of the influence and advantage of others. This research illuminates the need for nuanced analyses that acknowledge not only social position, but also race and gender if we are to understand the full impact that competitive schooling systems have on the everyday lives and the practices of parents.

Types of Choosers

Although detailed accounts of parents' behaviour in school markets including, information-seeking, sense-making and negotiation of admissions criteria are relatively sparse (Neild, 2005), some researchers have constructed profiles of parents based on these factors. Gewirtz et al. (1995) contribute profiles of parents based on their ability to navigate the choice system. Gewirtz et al. (1995) assert that 'privileged or skilled choosers' inherit a strong inclination to exercise choice, a "capacity to engage with and utilize the possibilities of choice" (p. 25) and often have contradictory social principles. Travel and distance to school are not deciding factors in privileged choosers final decisions and they are competent decoders of school climate and rhetoric (Gewirtz et al., 1995). Although their preferences are guided by a need to maintain distinctions and categorizations "by means of arbitrary exclusions and selections" (Gewirtz et al. 1995.

p.40), on the other hand they are better able than other parents to disguise their racism. 'Semi-skilled choosers' are new to choice and rely heavily on the perceptions of others to help them decode schools. They give less weight to school ethos and are more likely to take rumor and reputation at face value. They are, however, concerned about social mix and proportion of ethnic minority students. These parents are more likely to choose what they believe is a 'good' school rather than a school that is the 'right match' for their child. 'Disconnected choosers' are not inclined to engage in the market since they are less likely to believe their child will be more successful at a different school. Their main concern is their child's happiness. They are least likely to connect their child's education with long-term outcomes and tend to be more blatant in their racism. Whereas skilled choosers shape family life around school organization, disconnected choosers are constrained by such structural elements as "expectations related to work roles, family roles, the sexual division of labour and the demands of household organization" (Gewirtz et al. 1995. p. 50). Thus, these parents are inclined to 'choose' local schools within walking distance of their homes. Vincent (2001) parallels Ball's (2003) skilled choosers with their description of high intervener parents as being "mostly white, higher educated, overwhelmingly homeowners and mostly public sector professionals" (Vincent, 2001, p.349).

Who Chooses?

Much has been written on the relationship of social class and school quasi-markets, indicating that middle-class parents are privileged by this system of educational provision and low-income parents are disadvantaged (Ball, 1990; David, et al., 1994; Ball et el., 1995; Reay, 2005). Although devolved budgets and site-based management appear

to be neutral in providing opportunities for parental participation, there is evidence to suggest that such reforms have not proven equally beneficial across class boundaries. In Britain and New Zealand, "the change to self-management of schools has not resulted in increased parental influence or real participation and empowerment of parents, especially low-income parents" (Brigham et al., 2003, p. 43). Howell and Peterson (2006) cite a Twentieth Century Fund report, which states "low-income parents are not natural 'consumers' of education" (Ascher, Fruchter & Berne, 1996), an assertion supported by Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996). Their findings indicate that typically middle class, more educated parents are best positioned to interpret information about schools, whereas less educated working class parents, although motivated to engage in the market, are limited by their family histories and consequent social skills and personal contacts. Where family income, parental education, occupation, race, language and family size are used to explain achievement, Belfield and Levin (2005) point out that these are merely indicators of social class and offer no insight into the specific practices of such families that account for the differences. Their research outlines specific conditions that advantage higher socio economic status (SES) students, such as having 'school-like' homes, stronger literacy and language relations, less conflict in the home and better nutrition. Also, these parents are less likely to "move residence such that their children must change school" (Belfield & Levin, 2005, p. 70). Additionally they find a correlation between family income and parent involvement in their children's schooling. Higher SES parents are "more likely to be involved in school-based activities… monitor the performance of their children's schooling more intensively and more effectively to assist their children in their homework" (Belfield & Levin, 2005, p. 72). Although the scope of this study does not

allow for generalizations about the relationship between active parents and income, it will address the specific behaviours of Edmonton's most active parents both inside and outside of the home.

Who Gets Information?

Social factors such as parents' "race, education level, household income, church attendance and length of residence in the district" (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003, p. 87) have also been connected to the amount of knowledge parents have about schools. Moe (2001) reveals that only 16 percent of parents in the US with less than high school education knew about vouchers compared with 76 percent of those with postgraduate training. While these findings do in fact indicate differences between groups, none offer explanation as to *why* these discrepancies exist.

Hamilton and Guin (2005), conclude that race and education level influence the type of information parents seek when selecting schools. Where parents with higher levels of education are able to rely on their social network for school information, parents with lower levels of education, such as African American and Hispanic parents, need to rely on formal sources of information such as school pamphlets and the media. Of course, for parents whose English is limited, such sources of information could be less than useful. On the other hand, in Philadelphia, where East African parents "knew almost nothing about the quality of curriculum or instruction" at Forrest High School (Neild, 2005, p. 288), they believed the interests of their children would be best served by attending school with students who could translate for them. This finding is instructive in its message that focusing on the role of information as both the primary contributor and

the solution to inequities in school markets may further privilege the dominant perspective at the expense of the marginalized.

What Information do Parents Seek and Why?

In an effort to 'equalize' the social field, Bosetti (2004) suggests that there is a need for "sufficient financial support or incentives for public alternative programs and private schools to recruit students from low income/disadvantaged families" (p. 393). This prescription is limited however, by rational choice logic and doesn't acknowledge that low SES parents may exclude themselves from schools, which they perceive to be elitist or beyond their reach (Lauder et al., 1999; Ball, 2003); nor does it consider the notion that different groups of parents may have different values, or different inclinations. For example, research from the UK indicates that "the middle classes are much more likely to have their eye on some distant horizon." (Ball et al., 1996 p. 107) and are more likely than other parents to take examination results seriously, while working-class parents are more likely to place greater value on their children's happiness and their ability to attend school with their friends (Ball, 2003; Gewirtz et al., 1995). Contrary survey results from the US suggest that low income and minority parents are more concerned with test results, safety and their children learning basic skills than high income and white parents are (Hamilton & Guin, 2005). It is difficult to speculate why these findings differ. Perhaps the reason can be traced back to the local history of the respective sites: in the US school closures related to low test results and the *No Child Left Behind Act* and in the UK, to the importance of test results, such as the 11 plus entrance exams, on the future education of children.

How do Parents Seek Information?

Not only do parents across groups weigh formal information differently, based on their ability to meet the demands and restrictions of the market they access informal information differently as well. A process-based measure of equity, which has been thoroughly explored, involves how parents access information about schools when they are confronted with the obligation to choose. Ball et al. (1996) present evidence of parental choice in England that suggests that middle class parents are better informed than working-class parents when it comes to school choice. In contrast, Lauder et al. (1999) found that when New Zealand parents were asked to name the school they would choose if money and distance were not considered, there was no significant difference in the preferences of these social groups. Additionally, Brantlinger (2003) claims working class parents are actually more aware of educational disparities than middle class parents, since lower income families report resentment towards the better conditions of school that serve middle class students. Middle class parents reportedly acknowledge no differences or know nothing of working-class schools. These differences between studies may be related to the authors' definitions of 'information.' For example, Ball et al. (1996) focused more on parent's knowledge of admissions procedures and their strategies for preparing their children for long-term academic success, such as hiring tutors for the 11 plus entrance examinations, whereas Brantlinger (2003) focused on awareness of disparities. The reason for the difference between the findings of Lauder et al. (1999) and those of Ball et al. (1996) can be found in scope. Where Lauder et al. (1999) addressed only a small part of the choice process in asking parents about their choice of one school, Ball et al. (1996) investigated the long term process of choice that looked beyond

parents' choices of schools. Regardless of such contradictory findings, strong evidence from research examining parent networks, indicates that parents with well-developed research skills have an advantage in guiding their children through the choice process (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Lareau, 1989; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999; Useem, 1992).

Several authors have compared the relationship between social class and the use of social networks. Both Bosetti (2004) and Gewirtz et al. (1995) found that parents from all social classes access information through talking with friends, neighbours, other parents and family. Woods et al. (1998) indicates that middle class parents are more likely to speak directly with teachers and principals and visit schools than working class parents. These studies point to the essential role of information within a rational choice scheme. By exposing the centrality of social networks in parents' decision-making processes, this research points to the flawed assumptions inherent in rational choice theory that parents primarily access formal information while choosing or that the theoretical information necessary to make an 'rational' decision is readily available, comprehensive and easily interpreted by parents across social groups.

In the UK Ball (2003) found that it is primarily middle- class parents who rely on 'hot knowledge' from people in their social networks to access 'inside information.' In Philadelphia, where little 'high-quality' information was available, low-income parents are also forced to rely on social networks to aid them in their decision-making (Neild, 2005). Bosetti (2004) points out that "parents, whose network does not provide access to relevant and valuable information regarding options of school choice, are limited in their capacity to make informed choices" (p. 388). Here again, the primacy of agency in school markets may be somewhat misleading since governing educational bodies control formal

information. For this reason, it is worthwhile investigating what information various school markets provide to help parents in their decision-making.

Available Information

In the United States, the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation requires schools to report test scores for racial, ethnic and SES subgroups and to provide limited information on teacher quality (Hamilton. and Guin, 2005, p. 51). The *Ofsted Inspection Reports* in the UK provide the most detailed information about schools ranging from achievement and standards to personal development and well-being. Each criterion of school quality is given a ranking ranging between one and four based on two days of observation and interaction with staff and students. Reports rank effectiveness, efficiency and inclusiveness of the school, student attendance, behaviour and spiritual development, health and safety.

Information Gap

Although there are several weaknesses in relying on better information to equalize the field, the fact remains that if some parents are better informed than others it can only exacerbate existing inequalities. Henig (1996) cite Carver and Salganik (1991) analysis of the content, format and distribution of information available to parents in states and districts that offered choice plans and found that "some of the most valuable kinds of information were not generally available" (Henig, 1996, p. 110). Neild (2005) found the same thing, where most parents desired information but lacked crucial knowledge, such as school performance and chance of admission to make an informed choice What

information is relevant to parental choices has been the subject of many studies (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003; Neild, 2005; Hamilton & Guin, 2005). Like all other aspects of school choice, this too varies from site to site and is largely dependent on structural influences.

Van Dunk and Dickman (2003) suggest that in order for parents to make an informed decision they need to know a school's curriculum and method of instruction. Adnett and Davies (2002) adds that parents should also be aware of available options, how they differ and how to distinguish programs that will benefit their children from those that will not serve them well. They are careful however to point out that "better information… does not guarantee that parents will select the best school or avoid the trap of confounding test results with socio-economic background" (The Brown Centre on Educational Policy). Other authors assert that more detailed information is required in order to capture the complexities of the decision at hand (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003; Neild, 2005; Hamilton & Guin, 2005). Neild (2005) claims that parents want to know graduation rates; course-taking patterns and the availability of advanced or specialized courses; achievement of entering freshmen from the previous year, indicating the percentage falling into different ranges; the qualifications of teachers assigned to the schools or program, as well as year-to-year staff stability; the percentage of students generally admitted; and to the extent possible, the specific careers to which the school or program directs students (Nield, 2005, p. 295). Other studies find that parents want to know about teacher-student ratios, availability and role of computer instruction and early foreign language instruction, school safety and discipline (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003; Hamilton & Guin, 2005). Bosetti (2004) suggests that minimally, parents need access to

quality information (but doesn't specify criteria for judging such a thing), available options, guidance in their selection and public transportation in order to actively engage in school choice.

Information Barriers

Researchers from the US, including Wilson (1992) and Carver and Salganik (1991), indicate that, "school officials often seem to purposefully keep the costs of gathering information high" (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003, p. 105, 106), going so far as to say that some principals "simply refused to provide information about their schools," with no explanation as to why (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003, p. 105, 106). Given this paucity of accessible information in many school markets, parents must consider other factors in making their decision.

What Ultimately Informs Parents?

Evidence suggests that parents often value familiarity, based either on their own educational experiences (Neild, 2005), or cultural compatibility (Hamilton & Guin, 2005). Some studies find that parent choices are informed partly by school ethos (Adnett & Davies, 2002; Gewirtz et al., 1995), a nebulous explanation, which may point to the fact that parents are not always aware of what informs them, let alone what they should know when choosing a school. Henig (1996) describes this further:

> Lacking sharper differentiation among programs, given imperfect and unevenly distributed information and in light of the fact that matching children with programmatic specialties appears to be a lower priority for parents than pursuit of a generally good school, race and cultural familiarity continue to play a role in shaping parental choices among schools (p. 114).

The role familiarity plays in choosing schools has often been found to extend beyond the vagueness of school climate. Where Hamilton and Guin (2005) report that parents in Massachusettes rarely cite race or convenience as informing their decision of where to send their child to school, an analysis of parents' use of an Internet database finds otherwise with student body being one of the first attributes searched. This finding is interesting in that it uncovers the tendency for parents not to be completely forthcoming in their accounts of their own perceptions and behaviours. On the other hand, Howell and Peterson (2006) say that in urban centers in the US, "academic quality does not figure prominently in parents' thinking about school" (p. 135) and that proximity, religious services, SES and racial composition of the school are the primary reasons parents use vouchers for private schools. Indeed, around the globe, investigations of school markets reveal that parents, particularly White parents, make racialized decisions when choosing a school for their children. In the US, Scott (2005) and Shapiro and Johnson (2005) found racially segregating effects, claiming, "the extent to which White and minority students attend a schools is directly related to the racial composition of the school" (Scott, 2005, p. 10), while in New Zealand, "Pakeha families are the quickest to avoid the school at the "bottom of the heap" (Waslander & Thrupp, 1995, p.13).

EFFECTS OF SCHOOL MARKETS

Back to Basics

As part of the international movement toward neo-liberal reforms, the 'back to the basics' movement, along with, high-stakes testing and accountability have proliferated in school quasi-markets. In the US Hayes (2006) cites the *Nation at Risk* report (1983) and

the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (2002) as policies aligned with conservative interests, which support the return to traditional education.

In the UK, researchers have found that some schools maintain the appearance of traditional education, including insistence on uniform, increase in exclusions and strict discipline policy, as a strategy to attract middle class students, believing traditionalism to be a prevailing value of middle-class parents (Waslander & Thrupp, 1995; Gewirtz et al.,1995; Woods et al., 1998). Woods et al. (1998) suggest that focusing on the academic is not a response to consumer demand and Gewirtz et al. (2003) support their position by saying there is very little evidence of the rampant traditionalism that conservative commentators perceive among parents; nor is there any marked hostility to comprehensive education. Whether or not it is middle-class parents who are driving this reform, there does appear to be a demand for a 'return to basics' in education (Brigham et al., 2003).

Reay's (1997) research of mothers' engagement in school quasi-markets found that mothers used both discourses of consumerism and 'back to basics' to make sense of their involvement with their children's education. In Ontario, back-to-basics parent groups organized a campaign of derision against public schools, declaring a crisis in education in the late 1980s. These parents proclaimed that child-centered pedagogy was ineffective, that whole language techniques were incapable of teaching students to read, that discipline was weak, that "education bureaucracy [was] too bloated and that spending [was] out of hand" (Dehli, 1996, p. 7). Parents defined their educational goals as synonymous with 'quality,' 'excellence' and 'standards.' From this, there appears to be a connection between neo-liberal ideology and the return to traditional schooling.

Exclusivity and Segregation

At its core, segregation is a physical phenomenon, with both student bodies and educational programs being separated in distinct spaces. Brigham et al. (2006) found that "a major result of choice policies globally has been to increase social class segregation in schools" (p. 65). Even where choice policies exist, the old system of 'selection by mortgage' appears to remain in place since 'good' schools are often located in more prosperous neighbourhoods whose residents continue to gain privileged access to them. In Salt Lake City, as with Edmonton and most other districts that offer diverse programming, curriculum specializations, including special needs and 'behavior disorder' programs are placed in communities based on the perceived needs of students (Buendia et al., 2004). In New Zealand, Waslander and Thrupp (1995) found that the appeal of exclusivity, created through selective admissions criteria, and oversubscription, which is often associated with programs in middle-class neighbourhoods, generated even greater interest in schools in this position. In this way, high SES schools and communities were insulated from possible detriments associated with school markets.

Markets concern themselves with what Gamarnikow and Green (2003) call *beaconization*, which creates "an explicit and unambiguous hierarchy of schools, identified and ranked, from which students are asked to choose and to which they are forced to identify" (p. 214). Whether or not an individual chooses, by virtue of the fact that multiple educational tiers exist, there is no choice but to be ordered as well. In the UK, Taylor (2002) identified hierarchies within geographical competition spaces, which he identified based on student mobility patterns. In each case he found that students traveling out of their catchment area were attending schools with better league table

scores than their own neighbourhood school. Interview-based research addressing the relationship between parent behaviour and social class in school markets (e.g. Gewirtz et al., 1994; Ball et al., 1996) clearly illustrates parents' desire to secure 'the best' for their children. Although parents do not directly refer to competition over a set of predetermined schooling outcomes, "what does emerge strongly is a sense of competition for limited places at 'good' schools and the peer groups these schools provide" (Adnett & Davies, 2002, p. 124).

Spiral of Decline

Because "schools that have lost a well-balanced social class mix of students will have suffered a decline in their performance" (Lauder et al., 1999, p. 94), schools, and by proxy students, suffer from a cyclical kind of market domination where low measures of student achievement result in higher achieving, usually wealthier, students leaving, which in turn creates even lower achievement, thus resulting in a "spiral of decline" (Ball, 2003). In New Zealand, as in most of the countries addressed in this chapter where there is a high correlation between class and race, Waslander and Thrupp (1995) warn that "it is difficult to tell whether this exit out of the school should be read as white flight that happens to have a higher SES or class flight that happens to be white" (p. 16). It has been made clear internationally, that schools in low-income areas are most likely to find themselves under threat of closure. In the UK, since legislation was passed in 1993 authorizing schools to "limit the admissions of students based on the students' academic 'abilities'" (Tomlinson 1997, p. 67) (although performance is often significantly different

than ability) 33 'failing' secondary schools have been concentrated in deprived urban areas with high proportions of minority students.

Another crucial element, which highlights the role of 'structure' in the functioning of school quasi-markets, including school closures, is the continuous involvement of either the state or, in Alberta, the district, in order to 'manage' the market place. For example, in the US, "the term 'failing' was redefined, and few schools fell into the category" (Brigham et al., 2006, p. 17). Additionally, school closures, or 'spirals of decline' can be exacerbated by the competition requirements of the market, which exposes the paradox of forcing already disadvantaged schools into a position of wasting time and resources on marketing in an effort to remain viable (Tomlinson, 1997; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995). "Our efforts might be better directed to the improvement of common schools than to the strengthening of alternatives" (Callan, 1997, p. 186).

MIDDLE CLASS FRACTIONS

Within the school choice literature, the middle class has largely been described as a homogeneous group (Waslander & Thrupp 1995; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Tomlinson, 1997; Woods et al., 1998; Adnett & Davies, 2002; Ball, 2003;). Authors have usually focused on the advantages of the middle class over the working class, but there has also been some work (eg. Bourdieu, 1986; and Savage, Barlow, Dickens & Fielding, 1992; Lee 1993) that highlights "the internal fragmentation of the middle classes" (Ball & Vincent 2001, p. 183). Researchers have identified various factions within this group including those based on occupation, such as public versus private sector employees (Dunleavy, 1980; Perkin, 1989), or "the intellectuals and specialists in symbolic [as

opposed to material] production" (Featherstone, 1991, pp. 34-35). Hanlon (1998) describes a struggle between the managerial and the professional classes and Berger (1987) asserts there is a conflict between "the old middle class (occupied in the production and distribution of material goods and services) and a new middle class (occupied in the production and distribution of symbolic knowledge)" (Power, 2001, p. 199). Savage et al. (1992) describe a division within the middle class based on the ownership of different assets: entrepreneurs with property assets, managers with organizational assets and professionals with cultural capital. Despite these studies, both Power (2001) and Ball & Vincent (2001) call for further investigations of the different ideologies and practices of the middle class.

> Examining the intimate relationship between education and the middle class and the complex way in which schools foster differentiated middle-class identities can throw light on some of the enduring issues within the sociology of education (Power, 2001, p.201).

In Edmonton's context, as with others, such issues may include a greater understanding of the

relationship between school choice and occupational destination (Power, 2001).

CHOICE IN ALBERTA

In Alberta, a change to *The School Act* in 1988 allowed for the development of alternative programs that emphasized a particular language, culture, religion or subject matter. While there were already nine alternative programs available in Edmonton Public Schools at the time, this policy change allowed for greater diversity of provision, and the creation of religious alternatives in particular. This can be compared with the Board's position just six years earlier when they declared that they would not permit the

development of religious alternatives on the grounds that "our universal system of education [could] only be weakened by religious fragmentation" (Edmonton Public School Board Policy HGAA, 1982). In 1994, the provincial government passed Charter school legislation, which further supported parental choice and increased diversity of provision.

Who Chooses?

In the 2006-2007 school year, in one Alberta city, 47% of parents sent their child to the designated school. Although it is unknown whether sending students to the local school in Alberta is tied to race or class, according to Bosetti (2004) this choice is made "without seeking any prior information" (p. 399). A lack of such demographic information is problematic it is not known if these are differences across groups based on social class, race or other characteristics.

Who Gets Information?

In Edmonton, Maguire (2006) found that Internet access, language barriers and reliance on public transportation interfered with the ability of lower SES and minority parents to access information about schools. The parent survey carried out in this study revealed low-income and minority families are just as interested as their higher-income counter-parts in making the best choice for their children, and they use the same sources of information, but they are "less likely to approach school authorities for that information" (p. 85).

Brigham et al. (2006) found that in Alberta, "the vast majority of citizens know very little about school choice alternatives" (p. 45). Maguire (2006) points to the necessity for choice policies to recognize the information needs of minority and low-income families, cautioning that "if these issues are not attended to, choice may become an instrument of elitism and another arena where the 'haves' are easily distinguished from the 'have-nots'" (p. 84).

What Information do Parents Seek and Why?

In Alberta, public school parents, who have lower incomes and lower levels of education than their alternative school counterparts are less likely to consult achievement test results than alternative school parents (Bosetti, 2004). Because this research was carried out in a Calgary district that didn't have open boundaries, alternative school parents were considered to be those who subscribed to charter schools, as opposed to the kinds of alternative programs offered in Edmonton's public school system. Most, if not all available demographic information for Edmonton comes from Maguire's (2006) study. This research indicates that parents earning less than $65,000 most often cited location as the most important factor in choosing a school. Parents with incomes from $65,00-$95,000 selected both teacher performance and quality of education as the most important factor, and those earning more that $95,000 declared curriculum as the dominant consideration (Maguire, 2006). Here, transportation can be seen as an important factor in the equitable functioning of the school marketplace. In Alberta, 20% of public school parents and 19% of alternative school parents reported that lack of transportation impeded their access to another public school (Bosetti 2004). This may be due to the time

and cost involved, which can be major obstacles, particularly for low-income families who are seeking an alternate program for their children (Maguire, 2006). In Edmonton, principals indicate that it is common for students to return to their original school after trying an alternative because the commutes were too long.

> Intra-district choice plans are shaped to a large extent by their transportation policies. These are generally driven by complex provincial regulations and funding formulae, which in many cases limit the flexibility of the district to provide the necessary transportation subsidies or busing support for all families seeking to enroll their children in alternative programs. Removing barriers to choice through the provision of adequate and equitable student transportation presents a challenge for the provincial government and for school districts (Mcguire, 2006, p. 84).

Importantly, Maguire (2006) identifies policy makers as those who should be held accountable for the development and maintenance of a more equitable system of provision.

How do Parents Seek Information?

In Alberta Bosetti (2004) found that of private school parents, alternative program parents and public school, alternative school parents were most likely to consult school achievement reports before making their final decision, whereas public school parents were least likely to seek out any form of information before sending their child to their designated school.

Available Information

In Canada, the *Fraser Reports,* published annually by the conservative think tank The Fraser Institute offer achievement information including the percentage of students in grades three, six, nine and twelve who met grade level expectations as well as those

that met standards of excellence. These data are divided by gender and also include average parent education at a given school. Finally, based on the results of normative tests, schools are ordered and ranked by the Fraser Institute, although authors do not highlight this, rankings corresponding to neighbourhood SES.

Information Barriers

Maguire (2006) acknowledges that "reliable and comprehensive information by which a parent can compare schools is difficult to access and assemble" (p. 85) yet recommends improvements to reporting systems such as couching academic performance information within the demographic it represents (Maguire, 2006). In Edmonton, almost 40% of respondents surveyed indicated that they would have used the services of a Parent Information Centre, had one been available (Maguire, 2006); However, such a centre would be limited in its ability to help parents know the potential of their child, the capacity of each school to fulfill that potential, how the schools' influence would be valued in the labour market at a later date and what effect their decision might have on the education of other children. Using information as a cure for the exacerbation of social inequities wrought by school quasi-markets is a liberal notion that presumes that people actually access information before making decisions, that everyone is equally interested and able to gather and interpret information, and that objective, comprehensive information is accessible. There is no guarantee that more or different information will result in better outcomes. Not every variable in a given decision can be known, let alone weighed and measured, nor can it necessarily be related to parent behaviour.

Additional barriers include the ability and inclination of educational institutions, schools or districts to provide coherent and relevant information. Websites of Edmonton schools offer very little information that address the issues raised in the literature, such as equity and demographics. The policy of housing alternative programs along side mainstream programs in the same school, allows the district to limit the public reporting of achievement results to an aggregated number representative of the school and all programs within it as well as to take the position that students are not segregated by the system of choice.

What Ultimately Informs Parents?

In Edmonton Taylor (2003) cites a school district official who notes that white parents were avoiding a particular high school with a large Arabic population. If school markets continue to be informed by both class and race as is often the case, it appears choice is likely to intensify segregation at best and encourage intolerance and increased racism at worst.

Effects of School Markets

Back to Basics

In 1972 the *Worth Report* was released in Alberta. It emphasized educational experimentation, student-centeredness and increased educational alternatives (Matsumoto, ATA website). This suggestion for educational alternatives was likely viewed as a means by which to move away from traditional modes of schooling toward 'progressive' modes of teaching and learning. Ironically, it is these 'progressive' modes

of teaching, including student-centredness, group work and hands-on learning, that have resulted in today's demand for traditional, teacher-directed programs, which have proliferated in school markets everywhere (Chubb & Moe 1992; Elliot & MacLenna 1994). Only five years later, in 1977 *The Harder Report,* released by the provincial government, championed 'back-to the basics' schooling, including an increase in achievement tests, compulsory grade 12 exams, and the removal of curricular options in place of greater focus on core subjects. In Edmonton Public Schools a 'back to the basics' or 'knowledge based' program called Ergo Sum has been the fastest growing alternative program for the last three years.

Exclusivity and Segregation

In Edmonton, alternative programs may utilize a wide array of admissions criteria including audition, portfolio, reference letters, signed adherence to program philosophy, mandatory volunteering and academic placement testing, all of which may foster the appearance of exclusivity. In this way specialization offered through the school system may "legitimate the dominant social order by naturalizing social differences through the ideology of 'natural gifts' or through the allocation of scholastic qualification" (Poupeau, 2000, p. 71).

Spiral of Decline

Edmonton, like other school choice sites has seen schools close due to declining enrollment. School closures are not exclusively the result of market competition. The district chooses program locations, reviews programs slated for closure and ultimately constructs the market that leads to population imbalances in the first place (Taylor &

Mackay, 2008). This particular effect of school choice remains an area for further study. At one location, in September of 2007, the regular program housed alongside Ergo Sum was closed, due to a lack of students. The Ergo Sum program now occupies the whole school, a situation that is contrary to district policy.

Gaps In the Literature

Edmonton's quasi-market remains largely understudied despite its position as a model for school districts across the globe (Emery Dosdal, 2001; Maguire, 2006). The work that has been done includes Maguire's (2006) primarily large-scale quantitative study (2006), including some qualitative research addressing administrator's perceptions in the Catholic district. Taylor (2001), Taylor and Woollard (2003), and Taylor, Schultz and Leard (2005) have also provided smaller, more nuanced qualitative studies within EPSB's quasi-market, and more work remains to be done. Writers elsewhere have investigated parents' perceptions and practices, which point to the need not only for more detailed accounting, including how choice policies have changed *parent* behaviour, but also further investigation of the different ideologies and practices of the middle class. Many questions remain to be answered; however, those that will be addressed by this study include the following:

- What are the characteristics of active choosers? (gender, class, race?)
- Why do active parents choose particular programs over others? How do they perceive the choice system? Do they recognize a hierarchy?
- How do active parents view their role in the education system? What does choosing look like? What do parents do before and after choosing?

- Are there any differences in the way active parents of elementary school students experience the choice process?
- What resources do active parents draw on in the schooling of their children
- What are some possible implications for their children and other people's children? For the district/ public education system as a whole? For the general public and political climate?

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Background

To better understand the structure of Edmonton's education system as a quasi-market, a closer investigation is needed where the constraints of district policy meet the agency and resources of parents. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the behaviour and perceptions of the most active parents in Edmonton's school quasi-market. This involves identifying the limitations of rational actor theories by defining the upper limits of agency, including parents' capacities to influence the education of other peoples' children. As a teacher, I am interested in gaining insight into parents' perceptions of their roles, including rights and responsibilities, in their child's education. I listened to parents describe their activities and reasons for the labour they invested in their child's education and attempted to connect their responses to previous research which examined the role of social reproduction within educational systems, particularly systems of choice. I wanted to move beyond the language of parental satisfaction in choice systems and to draw lines between the limitations of district policy, the behaviour of active parents and the potential effects for children whose parents are less active. I looked for notions of equity, social justice and deliberative democracy as well as market logic of risk associated with competition in the accounts parents gave in order to determine what norms might comprise the 'choice habitus.' Additionally, I wondered about the worldview of these parents and attempted to trace back the origins of their views in order to determine whether their perspectives were influenced by district doctrine and political rhetoric, or vice versa. That is, has the district shaped its practices

and policies to meet parental demand, have parents shaped their perspectives and practices around political language and district policies, or some combination of the two?

Research Paradigm

The methodology for this study is grounded in critical theory. According to Reed-Danahay (2005), "a major hallmark of critical ethnographers of education is their attempt to synthesize micro-level research with macro-level social processes and to be explicitly theoretical in their analyses" (p. 58). I have attempted this by connecting the specific behaviours and perspectives of very active parents with the role of schooling in social reproduction. Epistemologically, critical theory looks to historical realism, a virtual reality "shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values; crystallized over time" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 165). Although this project doesn't explicate the complete history of Edmonton's quasi-market, I do try to connect the historical development of educational policies to the "freedoms" of parents. The inquiry aim of critical theory is critique and transformation as well as restitution and emancipation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Through this study, I endeavor to provide a critical perspective of a system that has faced little challenge with the hope that some district practices might be amended to be more inclusive of those with fewer resources. The criteria for quality within the critical theory paradigm is the "erosion of ignorance and misapprehension; action stimulus," which is achieved through a "transformative intellectual" acting as advocate or activist (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 165). Bourdieu is particularly well suited for this bcause his work provides researchers the opportunity to

expose the conduits of power circulating beneath appearances accepted by the dominant culture as "natural and inviolable" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 292).

> Inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label *political* and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness. Whereas traditional researchers cling to the guard-rail of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world. Traditional researchers see their task as the description, interpretation or reanimation of a slice of reality whereas critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustice found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself. Horkheimer (1972) puts it succinctly when he argues that critical theory and research are never satisfied with merely increasing knowledge (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 291).

Another essential characteristic of critical theory is self-conscious criticism, or reflexivity. Throughout the process of this study I have attempted to reflect upon my pre-suppositions formed through my history as a student in the early days of Edmonton's quasi-market and as a teacher in the system as it is today. Both the research design and my understanding emerged throughout the process, particularly as the theory and analysis of the data came together in the writing.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest there is an imperative for critical research to embark upon a critical praxis through examining the "objective, material conditions" (p. 304) of the labour relations and in the work place so as to prevent the "neoliberal corporatist state" (p. 304) from gaining further ideological hegemony. Given what appears to be the incremental privatization of 'public' education (formula funding and the growing use of vouchers/ choice schemes), a critical approach is not only appropriate but necessary.

Data Collection

Sample (Purposive and Snowball)

Both the Ergo Sum program and the Carob Hill program provided purposive samples because both programs require parents to commit to involvement in their child's education.

However, beyond the choice of programs, samples were comprised of volunteers initially and in both cases, ultimately moved to a snowball sample. I first contacted the Ergo Sum Parent Society and attended a meeting, where I introduced myself and outlined the aim of the study as examining the behaviour of active parents. Several parents volunteered to be interviewed at that meeting and provided me with their contact information. One mother who was not present at the meeting contacted me and expressed interest in participating in the project. Four of the five Ergo Sum parents I interviewed were members of the parent society, and two were members of Ergo Sum's governing board. Finding parent participants from the Carob Hill program was more difficult because their meetings are closed, but after making a connection through a contact, I was able to connect with a couple of parents, one of whom was on the Carob Hill board. After I spoke with these parents, other parents showed interest, and I completed my inquiry with four parent participants from the Carob Hill program. In each program, one parent was intentionally sought to represent a group of parents identified by participants. In Ergo Sum, I solicited a parent who was new to Canada because most of the parents I interviewed had commented on the large proportion of immigrant families in the program. In the case of Carob Hill, a grandmother contacted me because she wanted to share the experiences of her mentally and behaviorally challenged granddaughter in the program. Once again, this

family was an important addition because all of the previously interviewed parents had identified challenges with accommodating special needs children. All participants involved in this study were women, with the exception of one man who joined his wife during the interview. This was an unintentional pattern that emerged on its own as the research progressed. Further, interviewing only four Carob Hill parents compared to five Ergo Sum parents is a reflection of the difficulty I had in finding available, willing participants.

Where Patton (1990) suggested that, "purposeful sampling is also a strategy to help manage the trade-off between the desire for in-depth detailed information about cases and the desire to be able to generalize about the program" (p. 101), it's important to point out that I don't intend to make generalizations about the program, or all of its parents. I aim simply to extend what is known about the specific practices and perceptions of very active parents. Active parents have been determined in two ways. First, I chose parents who were involved in alternative programs because "with respect to organized parent activity, every category of parental involvement [is] higher in the choice schools than in prior public schools" (Witte, 2007, p. 132). Second, both of the chosen programs require parents to commit to involvement in their child's education, which, if not directly addressing the role of resources and social class in school choice, at least acknowledges "the phenomenon of social exclusion which arises directly or indirectly from the process of increasing contractualisation" (Somerville, 2000, p. 10). Table 1 (below) provides information about interview participants.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Program ERGO SUM	Name	Level of Education	Occupation	Hours spent on Child's Education/Week
Couple #1	Lisa	Undergraduate Degree	Accountant	1.5
	Mark	Some University	Systems Analyst	
Couple #2	Nellie	Undergraduate Degree	Piano Teacher	5
	Husband	Undergraduate Degree	Lawyer	
Couple #3	Sally	College Diploma	Library Technician	Not Available
	Ex-husband	Undergraduate Degree	Chartered Accountant	
Couple #4	Annie	Grade 10	Book Keeper/ Homemaker	3
	Husband	Grade 8	Service Station Owner/Operator	
Couple #5	Lucy	Undergraduate Degree	Homemaker	5
	Husband	Undergraduate Degree	Stock Broker/ Financial Advisor	

Program CAROB HILL	Name	Level of Education	Occupation	Hours spent on Child's Education/Week
Couple #1	Jennifer	Some College	Self-Employed	20
	Husband	Undergraduate Degree	Concrete Driver	
Couple #2	Kelly	Undergraduate Degree	Mother at Home	5.5
	Husband	Some University	Business owner/ Machinist	
Couple #3	Barb	Masters Degree	Stay at Home Mom/ Psychologist Prior	21+ (10 hours transportation per week – lives out of town)
	Husband	Masters Degree	Program	

			Manger	
Couple #4	Lynn	University Degree	Social Worker	3
	Bonnie (Lynn's Mom- helps with child rearing)	Some College	Social Worker	

Program Enrollments

The Ergo Sum and Carob Hill programs vary considerably in scope and student enrollment. Although no precise data are available regarding student enrollment in the Ergo Sum program within the district, it is currently located in seven schools across the city, from kindergarten to grade nine, and in one school operates alone since it is large enough to occupy the whole school. By contrast, Carob Hill operates at one site and has only 40 students enrolled from Kindergarten to grade six. There may be more than one reason for the difference in size between the programs including the programs' respective relationships with the district and, the marketing of the programs. As is discussed in chapter five, Carob Hill has a history of animosity with district officials. Parents have also have been convinced through past program closures, that if their program grows, the parents, who currently interview for entrance to the program, have input into the curriculum of the program and are in charge of marketing the program, will lose their control. Ergo Sum is marketed by the district on the sides of busses and in newspapers, where as Carob Hill is marketed by the parents society in a free midwifery magazine and at the PRIDE centre (a Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer association). Since the Carob Hill program limits the communities it advertises to, it will likely maintain a small enrolment. On the other hand, many Ergo Sum participants reported

their program as being popular with various ethnic groups, which gives the program several large populations to draw from.

Pre-Interview Questionairre and Interview

Before parents were interviewed, each participant received a pre-interview questionnaire as well as a letter of consent via email. The letter outlined the project and informed the prospective participant of her right to drop out of the study at any time and remove her data with no penalty. Copies of these can be found in Appendix II and Appendix III.

The questionnaire was sent out in order to attain some limited demographic information, including parents' occupations, and highest level of education. It also provided participants with some questions upon which to reflect prior to the interview, including the number of hours they devoted to specific activities related to their child's education and which factors they were most interested in when they were initially choosing the program. Because questionnaires and surveys are limited in their ability to capture some of the "messy, multi-dimensional, intuitive and seemingly irrational or non-rational elements of choice" (Gewirtz et al., 1995, p. 6), each parent in this study participated in an interview of approximately one hour. All of the interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and sent back to those participants who requested it for member checks. Four of the nine participants requested the transcripts, and none made changes. Interviews were semi-structured, and an interview schedule was used with all participants. The interviews explored their general perceptions, feelings, purpose, and their own past experiences. Because I was interested in various perspectives, in many of

the interviews, I asked additional questions beyond those that were identified in the schedule. A copy of the interview guide is in Appendix I.

Data Analysis

Consistent with the notion that critical theory is not neutral, Gadamer (1970) asserts that interpretation is not methodological in nature, but rather ontological. For that reason, I did not always take parents' accounts at face value. Instead, I looked for deeper meanings in their discourses that could provide insight into the ideological perspectives of these active parents. I began my analysis by identifying common themes across the interviews. I then coded the transcripts, refining the themes to incorporate irregular or contrasting responses. Finally, I reflected on the congruency of the analysis with existing theoretical models, which helped me to pull out key findings in the research.

Trustworthiness

Interpretivism rejects the primacy of scientific realism and suggests rather than using science's "unclear" processes and codes of conduct, education research should be "systematic, credible, verifiable, justifable, useful, valuable and 'trustworthy' (Wellington, 2000, p.14). Trustworthiness is used to address generalizability, reliability and validity within social scientific research. "*Generalizability* refers to the degree to which the findings are application to other populations or samples" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 786). It addresses the degree to which the original data could be representative of a larger population. *Reliability* represents "the extent to which a test, a method or a tool gives consistent results across a range of settings" (Wellington, 2000, p. 31) and *validity* is a measure of "the degree to which a method, a test or a research tool actually measures

what it is supposed to measure" (Wellington, 2000, p. 30). I attempted to ensure trustworthiness in this study through triangulation and discussing the data with my advisor as suggested in Wellington (2000).

Triangulation

Triangulation involves lending support to findings by "drawing on evidences from other sources" (Wellington, 2000, p. 201). Data were gathered from multiple sources, including questionnaires and surveys, representing diverse positions, and member checks were performed. Finally, the data were analyzed in the context of evidence from other researchers.

Transferability

The findings of this study are specific to these programs in this site and are not intended to be transferred to other choice systems. However, it is possible to have some degree of generalizability, particularly through comparison with other sites since there is some "fittingness" or "degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 110). Common to all school markets is a market ideology that assumes all actors have equal agency and some degree of district/ state involvement. I hope my description of Edmonton's quasi-market has been robust enough to provide others with adequate information to evaluate the comparability of sites and the applicability of these findings.

Significance

The significance of this study is two-fold: the key findings can be used as a comparison with districts from other sites and the study points to the need for further

investigation into the effects of Edmonton's quasi-market. I investigated the lived experiences of active parents in choice systems, gained insights into their perceptions of themselves and others, their ability to access power and meaningfully impact schools and the lives of students other than their own children.

Delimitations

White (2007) acknowledges that small-scale research sacrifices generalizability but permits deeper investigation of complex processes, interpreted through participants' biographies, which can provide "valuable insights for future researchers examining the same phenomena on a larger scale" (p. 25). Participants in this study were not chosen in an effort to generalize populations to other sites, but rather to examine their perceptions and practices as a position from which to investigate institutional ruling relations (Andre-Bechely, 2005).

Limitations

This study has three limitations. First, it is clear that this study's participants have access to large quantities of suitable cultural and social capital, and since economic capital is the foundation of all other capital (Bourdieu, 1997), class can generally be inferred, but only by analyzing parents' occupations and access to resources. Parents' income was not collected, and publicly available demographic information by program is not available. Second, many scholars have outlined the difficulty with questionnaires and interviews, since both methods rely on participants' memories and self-consciousness. Thus, parents often de-emphasize importance that race, ethnicity and SES played in their decision-making (Hamilton & Guin, 2005; Gorard 1999; Adnett & Davies, 2002).

Finally, four of the five Ergo Sum participants were 'established' Canadians as opposed to new Canadians. Although I am not certain about the demographics of this program, all of this study's participants mentioned the large populations of families who had immigrated from India, Asia and Eastern Europe. Because only one of the families I interviewed from Ergo Sum was an immigrant family, this cannot be said to be a representative sample.

Ethics

Ethical guidelines for the Protection of Human Research Participants were carefully considered and employed throughout this project. A research ethics application was completed and approved. Participation for the study was voluntary, and all participants were told via letter and at the time of the interview that they had the right not to answer any question and to drop out of the study, at any time, with their data removed at no penalty to them. Each parent was also told about the significance and purpose of the study. Many participants had opportunities to question me in greater detail as to the nature of the study. All parent volunteers signed written consent forms prior to their interview. Confidentiality of individual participants was ensured throughout the study through the use of pseudonyms and appropriate security measures regarding electronic storage of both audio and transcribed interviews.

Reflection on Methodology

Andre-Bechely (2005) outlines four key principles to guide critical analysis of parents'

experiences of educational policy.

> *First, research on parents' participation in educational institutions must be faithful to the real world of parents and their interests on behalf of their children* (p. 23).

This is an important consideration, which I kept in mind as I was analyzing the data, since it directs accountability to district and state officials in positions to structure provision.

> *Second, researchers must recognize that the educational context is socially, culturally and historically situated for parents just as it is for educators* (p. 23).

I attempted to address this in the interviews by examining participants' histories.

> *Additionally, studies of parents' involvement in their children's education must search for how institutional discourses have constituted and positioned parents and mothers in particular in roles that reproduce the historical effects of schooling* (p. 23).

This principle directed the documentary analysis.

> *And finally, research must not lose sight of how material positions, racial privilege and dominance still matter in our social institutions* (p. 23).

While it would have been preferable to address more directly these considerations in the research, data were not available without going through the district. Due to an unrealistic waiting time, district access was limited, which in my view, is a significant detriment to educational research, and possibly explains the relative lack of work done in this area. Not asking participants for more detailed demographic information is regrettable.

CHAPTER 4 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> *...If all forms of domination must be rationally justified to be accepted as legitimated then one must also explain the mode of rationalization which gives the power of reason to those who have the greatest power* (Poupeau, 2000, p. 71).

Structure and Agency

Pierre Bourdieu's work is compatible with the aims of this project on several levels. Perhaps most importantly, his ideas are epistemologically attuned to demonstrating the limitations of agency since he himself "staked out his own position against rational actor theories" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 53), and used the notions of field, habitus and practice to demonstrate "how individuals as social agents participate in social reproduction through behaviours that appear as freely made "choices" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 53). Indeed, at the core of Bourdieu's agenda is an attempt to overcome "the problematic extremes of objectivist and subjectivist approaches to sociology" (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p. 30) and to resolve not only the structure-agency binary, but also all perennial dualisms common to social-scientific thought.

> ...those between subject and object, choice and constraint, consent and coercion, or between the purposive and meaningful activity through which agents construct their world, on the one hand and the impersonal compulsion and limits that the gravity of social structures imposes upon them, on the other (Wacquant, 2005, p. 136).

By taking into account the dialectical relationship between objective structural elements and individual subjectivities, Bourdieu fashioned a theory that moves beyond the simplicity of the structure-agency binary and offers a more nuanced image of the social complexities involved in decision-making. Decisions can be understood as the functioning of "practical sense" or cultural norms, "strategies devoid of strategic design" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 108). To Bourdieu, actions cannot be explained through mechanical

determinism; neither can they be explained through intention as represented by rational choice (Bellamy, 1994). Thus, in place of rationalist explanations of choice, Bourdieu (1990) provides a culturalist account: "Habitus is a 'conditioned and conditional freedom' and generates things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say, in relation to a probable upcoming future" (p. 53). Because "choices derive and are generated within the habitus" (p. 16) there is a limited degree of agency in Bourdieu's work, which is a point for criticism of his work. Preferences that lead to choices are actually embodied social structures; thus habitus is heavily influenced by structural elements (Wacquant, 2005).

Practice in Education

The relationship between structure and agency in Bourdieu's work is driven entirely by his concept of practice (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Investigating the behaviour and perceptions of the most active parents in Edmonton's school quasi-market provides a benchmark from which to challenge assumptions of market proponents and rational choice theory. By uncovering the vast array of resources these parents draw on in their quest for the best education for their children, we can define the upper end of the agency continuum in terms of both potential and constraints caused by structural restrictions. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study was developed to investigate the relationship between parents, institutions and broader social relationships.

Since Bourdieu wrote prolifically on the correlation between the French educational system and the maintenance of social class systems (Reed-Danahay, 2005), it is also practical to use his concepts as tools for analysis of Edmonton's school market.

Although demographic information for schools and alternative programs is unavailable in the Edmonton context, Bourdieu's notions of habitus and capital provide a method by which to study the differential abilities of parents to operate within a choice system. Certainly, one of the greatest strengths of Bourdieu's work is in its capacity to uncover otherwise concealed operations of power, particularly within educational systems.

> Surely among all the solutions put forth throughout history to the problem of the transmission of power and privileges, there does not exist one that is better concealed, and therefore better adapted to societies which tend to refuse the most patent forms of the hereditary transmission of power and privileges, than the solution which the educational system provides by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of class relations and by concealing, under an apparently neutral attitude the fact that it fulfills this function (Wacquant, 2005, p. 135).

Bourdieu equates academic meritocracy with aristocracy by exposing the way educational rhetoric of "natural abilities" conceals inherited cultural advantages (Swartz, 1997). Academically ranked paths legitimize, and thus disguise, both the educational "ghettos" and the hierarchy that creates them. Bourdieu also used the metaphor of religious authority to describe the way in which the Grandes Ecoles (elite French post-secondary schools) justify their privileging of the upper classes through the practice of separating out the 'chosen' (Reed-Danahay, 2005). Thus, even while dominant groups may champion politically correct, liberal discourses of equality, they are simultaneously able/ compelled to adopt mechanisms of reproduction through school choice.

France has a long history of supporting class distinctions through diversity of educational provision. Until the mid-twentieth century, working-class and rural children attended only primary school, while middle and upper class children attended primary schools that allowed for possibilities of secondary and higher education (Reed-Danahay, 2005). Once the expansion of higher education provided children of the lower classes

opportunities not previously available to them, dominant groups needed to strategize differently in order to ensure the legitimacy of their reproduction. Where the cultural transmission of the family was no longer enough, "the bourgeoisie came to depend increasingly on the school as a mode of reproduction" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 56). Because the French government regularly collects demographic information as it relates to parental background, there is little argument about the reproduction of the educational system and relationship between academic attainment and social class (Reed-Danahay, 2005).

Of course, there are important differences between France and Canada's education systems, not the least of which is the history and intention of their respective schooling systems. There is evidence to suggest that the common school idea in Canada, at least in part, originated as a way to extend and promote social justice and equality (Love, 1995, Von-Heyking, 2006). Indeed the practice in Edmonton's school quasi-market of locating alternative programs along side mainstream and special needs programs (Maguire, 2006), indicates an attempt to limit the degree of separation among groups. However, there are several cases of similar alternative programs being located in the same school. For example, programs using traditional pedagogy such as Christian, German and Ergo Sum are sometimes housed together. Although it has been argued that North American educational systems operate with the goal of furthering individual development and not simply to maintain the division of classes (Reed-Danahay, 2005), such arguments ignore the way in which *all schools* sanctify social distinctions by representing them as academic distinctions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

> Education as a field of distinctions and identities is crucial in high modern society in changing and reproducing the borderlines of class and distributing unevenly and unequally forms of social and cultural capital (Ball, 2003, p. 8).

Doxa and School Choice

The Inheritors moves beyond exploring the role of education in social reproduction and asserts that the very function of education is to create a social hierarchy (1979). This claim is juxtaposed with the notion of a democratic system of schooling wherein all students have equal access to educational opportunities and so demonstrates the intimate and important connection between education and political operations. In both this work and *Reproduction* (1977), Bourdieu and Passerson find that academic success or failure is related to students' social origins. Through his concepts of Doxa and symbolic violence, Bourdieu wields powerful tools in his effort to demonstrate the way in which academic selection is based in part on self-selection because subordinate groups appear to accept the conditions of their circumstance without imagining the possibility of an alternative (Swartz 1997). Further, since symbolic violence, like habitus, operates subconsciously, individuals are influenced by thoughts and feelings, which lead them to rule out some options before they even come to the choice. That is, these conceptual tools connect power structures to individual life-trajectories, and in this way are entirely compatible with the aims of this study.

Edmonton's Field of Choice

This project attempts to understand the ways in which district policies situate parents in the education field as well as how parents contribute to the construction of the field and its power structures through their participation and influence. Through studying

the relationship between the disposition of active parents and the functioning of school quasi-markets, I hope to explore the way choice can function as a form of capital, as its own social field and as a secondary habitus (a habitus informed by factors outside of the family of origin) to separate and exclude those lacking specific resources. In particular, I hope to investigate how education, mothering, power and policy intersect and, given Edmonton's open choice system, whether or not there is evidence to show that the practices of active parents affect the structure of the educational field. Because Bourdieu's concepts are inter-related and overlapping, separating them is something of a false distinction, but I do so for the purposes of clarity.

Society is made up of numerous fields including housing, education and power (politics), each governed by its own logic (Jenkins, 1992) and each subject to pressures from other fields (Bourdieu 2004). Although Bourdieu cites education as a relatively autonomous field (Swartz, 1997), as a public institution it intersects with economics, transportation, housing, politics, health care and more. Thus, this field is complex and subject to change both as a result of external pressures such as these, and from the practices of those struggling within it (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis 2006).

In this way "the educational field may be viewed not only as a *field of forces*, but also a *field of struggles"* (Bellamy, 1994, p. 128), where middle-class parents strategize to access a school appropriately distinguished from the now designated working-class 'common school. In Edmonton's choice system, diversity of provision through pedagogical and curricular specialization means that domination may be wielded, not in an obvious two-tiered system, but obscured in a complex web of finely ranked conduits, where the lowest in the hierarchy are positioned thusly not because they have been

deprived of an equal opportunity, but because it is viewed as a natural effect of choice. Bourdieu explains this disparity in academic achievement among the classes by asserting that academic selection is shaped by class-based *self-selection* (Swartz 1997). For him, because the choices of the working-class are all informed by "an inescapable deprivation of necessary goods," their culture is one of resignation to the limits placed upon them (Charlesworth 2000). EPSB offers a variety of alternative programs; however most are academic in nature, which may prevent many working class students from 'choosing.'

> The district's website describes 31 alternative programs that are offered at more than 80 locations in the city. Among these are eight different language programs, both immersion and bilingual: International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP) and accelerated programs; fine arts, sports, traditional learning, science, faith-based, ballet, military and single-gender schools (Maguire, 2006, p. 20).

Language programs include extra academic demands, particularly in grades one, two and three, since 'regular' programs aren't required to teach French until students are in grade four. As a private music teacher, I have written several letters of recommendation to demonstrate the student's commitment to the arts, a requirement (along with a portfolio) to access EPSB's Fine Arts programs. The ballet program also requires an audition for entrance. The IB, AP, accelerated and 'academic' programs such as Ergo Sum, along with those mentioned above, may be seen to carry an institutional habitus that may prevent students with less valued cultural capital from feeling comfortable. Thus, school choice in Edmonton Public Schools can be said to benefit the economic, cultural and social capital associated with the middle classes.

Edmonton Public Schools and Housing

The important role of housing in the functioning of Edmonton Public Schools is another way the school quasi-market can privilege the middle-classes. Although Edmonton operates with an open boundary system, it continues to designate students to their closest school for planning and tracking purposes (Maguire, 2006). Where schools are oversubscribed, catchment areas are invoked, thus insulating 'successful' schools (likely in affluent neighbourhoods) from market reforms (Waslander & Thrupp, 1995), and ensuring that the nature of a school's student body continues to be largely determined by the socio-geographical distribution of the local population. In this way, Edmonton's educational field of choice is, in many respects, an actual geographical field. "In the 2004/2005 school year, 49 percent of elementary students, 54 percent of junior high students and 56 percent of senior high students attended schools other than their designated school" (Maguire, 2006, p. 20). This averages to only 53 percent of Edmonton parents sending their children to the neighbourhood school, a surprisingly low number when compared to the national average of 80 percent (Maguire, 2006) Positioned nationally, Edmonton's field is clearly very conducive to the aims of active parenting. What remains unknown is what effect this labour has on the degree of stratification on and within schools, and what effect, if any, choice has on the long-term life trajectories of students whose families exercised choice.

Field Fences

There is, however, evidence of barriers in Edmonton's 'field of choice.' Admissions policies, information gaps and transportation were found to restrict low

income and "harder to educate students" in their ability to participate in the choice system (Maguire, 2006). Bourdieu conceives of the field as primary in determining the uneven outcomes of power distribution that supports social reproduction (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This is because structure is embodied through habitus, which leads to the practices that maintain class boundaries. Also, education, viewed as a "field of distinctions and identities" (Ball, 2003, p. 8), is a main venue by which social and cultural capital are unevenly and unequally distributed. In Edmonton Public Schools, the field of education is determined in large part by district and elected officials.

> …the issues explored in this study all support, to a greater or lesser degree, the thesis that choice design and the decisions made by district and school leaders will determine the success of their choice initiative (Maguire, 2006, p. 86).

However, the practices of agents within the field also give rise to it. As they participate in the field, people acquire a "feel for the game" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 70), and so just as "a scientist is a scientific field made flesh" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 41), so too is a chooser a field of choice made flesh. Studying the practices of active parents should contribute to a better sense of the limitations of Edmonton's educational field and hopefully uncover the sources of greatest influence so that suggestions for improvements can be directed in a productive manner.

Habitus

> *The choices that social agents make in their daily lives are "not the intellectual doings of a consciousness, explicitly positing its own goals through a deliberate selection between alternatives constituted as such by a project, but the result of the practical operation of habitus (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 2).*

If the field theorizes the "objectivity of the social situation (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p. 30), then habitus theorizes the agent. It is a dialectical relationship with the field

constructing the habitus on the one hand and on the other, habitus constituting the field as "a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 127). This description is particularly relevant for school markets where active parents must believe that their labour is wisely invested because it will have some positive affect in the futures of their children. Other definitions have declared habitus as "the cultural unconscious" (Kauppi, 2000, p. 15) or as "history turned into nature" (Bellamy 1994, p. 126). Importantly, both of these descriptions highlight the limited role of awareness in the functioning of habitus. It is a conditioning that allows students either to feel "at home" or "out of place at school" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 13) due to the compatibility of the school environment with the "cultural habitus and dispositions inherited from the original milieu" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 14). Thus habitus is both historically and culturally produced and operates in part at the level of the subconscious, since ideologies, preferences and rules are enacted through individuals who are often unaware that such a thing is happening (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). This unconscious operation of conditioning is made possible through the etching of power structures and relations onto the body, what Bourdieu refers to as 'embodied learning.' It is precisely because habitus, as an integral part of behaviour, partially involves unintentional, unconscious actions that it is a force of power. In this way structure is embodied, working on and through people's dispositions and activities, rather than on them. Encoded through socializing, beginning in childhood, habitus is inculcated by experience as much, if not more, than by explicit teaching (Jenkins, 1992).

Secondary Habitus

It is for this reason that habitus can change and be affected by factors outside of one's family of origin. This has been called secondary habitus and is termed so because while the primary habitus formed during childhood is always present, it can be informed by another habitus, the origin of which can be traced to elements such as "national discourses, school culture, peers and the mass media" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 59). It is represented in a kind of "mechanical solidarity," expressed through language (jokes, slang etc.), ways of moving, dressing and so on. Secondary habitus may also be applied to the way in which regional factors such as local identity, peer-culture, gender relations and religion are played out in class systems (Reed-Danahay, 2005). Rather than referring to a grand narrative such as psychoanalysis or structuralism, Bourdieu's notion of habitus allows for individual practices to be positioned within a given sociocultural context, and in this way we can see the operation of agency within this concept.

Choice Habitus

While several secondary habituses may be relevant to this project, class habitus and what I call choice habitus will be of primary importance in understanding the role of active parents in Edmonton's school quasi-market. In order to define the "choice habitus" it is important to investigate the practices of choosers, since habitus is formed through practice (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). In Bourdieu's work, practices are conceived of as being "fundamentally improvisatory, the spinning out over time of the process of adjustment between the constraints, opportunities and demands of specific social field and the disposition of the habitus" (Jenkins 1992, 179).

> Both field and habitus are continually produced and reproduced in flows of practice. In other words, there is not a field (structure) separate from a habitus (agency), the two of which somehow get connected through practice. Instead, neither field nor habitus could exist in the absence of practice. Both are produced in and through social practice. This is one of Bourdieu's most brilliant insights, and one that resolved the dilemma of structure and agency in a unique and creative way (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 66).

Paradoxically, social practices give rise to the conditions of possibility for both field and habitus. They both comprise and are comprised by groups or individuals acting within the limits of the field (p. Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Because of the cyclical nature of habitus (social structures produce habitus, which in turn produces social structures), history tends to repeat itself (Jenkins, 1992); however while habitus can contribute to the reproduction of existing social structures, in conjunction with practices that result from the intersection of habitus and the field, change is possible (Swartz, 1997). This is important to keep in mind as we critically analyze school choice and work towards its transformation.

In Edmonton, 92 percent of parents "strongly support" (Maguire, 2006, p. vi) the concept of choice and believe they had "sufficient information" (Maguire, 2006, p. vi) to choose an appropriate school for their children. Analyzed within Bourdieu's framework, these perceptions are not surprising in that the policy climate dictated by the district would be embodied by in the habitus of parents.

Encouraging parental involvement and providing a vast array of programs to choose from have become part of Edmonton parents' habitus, thus this group can be said to have a strong 'choice habitus.' The practices of these parents are instructive in furthering understanding of both the field of choice and the choice habitus. Over 70 percent of these parents considered more than one school for their child, and 62 percent report checking

annual achievement results for individual schools, which is 17 percent higher than the national average. Further, 91 percent of parents have "high expectations for parental involvement" in schools (Maguire, 2006, p. vi). Yet even in an environment such as this, lower income and minority parents are still less likely to "feel they have sufficient choice, to feel comfortable approaching school authorities, to have the resources to acquire information on choosing or accessing alternative options and in general experience more barriers to exercising choice" (Maguire, 2006). It would seem that the habitus of some parents' is better suited than that of others to navigate the field of school choice.

Bourdieu describes habitus in the following way:

> It continuously transforms necessities into strategies, constraints into preferences and, without any mechanical determination, it generates the set of "choices" constituting life-styles, which derive their meaning, i.e., their value, from their position in a system of oppositions and correlations (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 296).

Yet in Edmonton's school quasi-market it appears that higher income, dominant parents work most effectively within the confines of the field. Swartz (1997) supports this through his assertion that the rate of adaptation varies according to individuals' position within the field. He cites greater capital as the reason that French middle-class families were quicker than their working-class counterparts to take advantage of increased educational opportunities in the 1950s and 60s. Maguire's (2006) work in Edmonton's quasi-market echoes these findings, citing low income and minority parents as those who encounter the greatest difficulty exercising choice.

Capital not only works through and influences habitus, it is the venue by which power operates (Bourdieu, 2004).

Institutional Habitus

According to Reay, David and Ball (2005) institutional habitus is a means by which "raced and gendered processes are played out in the lives of students" and their educational choices (p. 35). For the purposes of this study, it will be thought of "as the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organization" (Reay, David & Ball, 2005, p. 36). Institutional habitus provides a means to understand how institutional histories, sanctified through tradition, both shape and are shaped by their catchments. This is possible by virtue of the institution's collective nature, which in turn makes it less fluid and more concrete than individual or even class habitus.

Capital

Capital exists only insofar as it as it confers power in relation to a given field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and as a result, it becomes the object of struggle in that field (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002). The presence and significance of capital also functions to undermine the assumptions of rational choice theory. The presumption that choice means equal opportunity and betterment for all is challenged by the central role of capital in school choice since "the distribution of all forms of capital is unequal, grounded as it is in the class structure" (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p. 31). Imperative to the unequal distribution and redistribution of social and cultural capital, which reproduces and reinforces the social relations of class, is the field of distinctions and identities created through educational choice (Ball, 2003). Because the "educational system depends less directly on the demands of the production system than on the demands of reproducing the

family group" (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 2000, p. 109), Bourdieu's work has provided sociologists with the ability to develop a theory of the family, which recovers the "centrality of family resources to educational differentiation" (Nash, 1990, p. 446).

Bourdieu (1997) outlines three fundamental species of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital deals with monetary and material wealth and can exist independently of any particular field in which it is used. Cultural capital is information capital and moves from the material to knowledge, skills, lifestyles and qualifications (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This capital exists in three forms. *Embodied* cultural capital is manifested in bodily demeanor. *Objectified* cultural capital is carried in books, writing and computers, and *institutional* cultural capital is wrought through certification and degrees that denote competence (Bourdieu, 1997). Social capital is "the existence and use of social networks; that is, group membership, contacts and shared identities accumulated exchanges and obligations, and actual or potential support and access to other valued resources" (Ball, 2003, p.80). All three species can act as symbolic capital if it is perceived as legitimate within the field or when the "arbitrariness of its possession and accumulation" are misrecognized as meaningful or natural (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

Social Capital

Social capital is perhaps the most laborious of the capitals and involves what Bourdieu (1986) calls "the unceasing effort of sociability…a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed" (p. 250). It works within groups to delineate membership through obligations and symbols to secure boundaries and develop

a sense of belonging. In this way, social capital strongly coheres "with the themes of social closure and class collectivism" (Ball, 2003, p.80). In school quasi-markets, the choice process itself creates social capital since people are more likely to work cooperatively toward a common goal when they feel they have freely chosen to join a group (Howell & Peterson, 2006). In school quasi-markets where official information is lacking, social capital is employed in three forms (Bellamy, 1994): information channels, or what Ball (1990) calls 'hot knowledge' (information attained from insiders or experts); obligations and expectations (for example car pooling rotations); and social norms, perhaps most clearly observed within specialized school programs, particularly religious and pedagogical alternatives. The defining characteristic of social capital is its usability.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu, is measured by its relative exceptionality and thus, works to distinguish, separate and rank individual and group practices.

> In cultural consumption, the main opposition, by overall capital value, is between the practices designated by their rarity as distinguished, those of the fractions richest in both economic and cultural capital, and the practices socially identified as vulgar because they are both easy and common (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 297).

Of the three forms of cultural capital, objectified capital and embodied capital are of particular relevance to educational practices (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). This capital is arguably the most useful in uncovering hidden operations of power in school quasi markets. Swartz (1997) points out that it is through cultural capital that Bourdieu was able to establish structural relationships between social stratification and educational processes. "Macro-level patterns of social-class inequality and unequal distribution of cultural capital are linked to micro-level processes of pedagogy, evaluation and

curriculum" (Swartz, 1997, p. 202). Several scholars have found that the middle-classes are most likely to have and use cultural capital to decode school materials and open houses as well as to map complicated admissions procedures (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Ball, 2003). In this way, the middle-classes are most able to exploit the opportunities created through choice schemes, often at the expense of those endowed with less cultural capital. In Edmonton, "comparison-shopping for schools was more prevalent among affluent and more educated groups with greater Internet and newspaper access" (Maguire, 2006, p. 85). Here, where 87 percent of parents believed they had sufficient information to choose a school for their child, 88 percent visited schools, and more than 62 percent checked school performance results in newspapers or websites (Maguire, 2006), it appears that most Edmonton parents are actively engaging in the market. What this doesn't demonstrate however, is whether differences in cultural capital affect practices of parents while they are accessing information, what information they find useful, and how they interpreted that information. Importantly, the power of cultural capital does not cease after admission. Differential student achievement is also closely related to "the volume and composition of cultural capital transmitted by the family" (Bellamy 1994, p. 123). In Edmonton where the public school district promotes an image of partnership with parents, the use of cultural and social capital becomes paramount for meaningful involvement.

For parents who would like to implement an alternative education program funded with public dollars, the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) *Alternative Parent Handbook* advises that during the inception of a new program, members of the parent's community or network could provide "expertise and resources" (p.5) in order to

facilitate the program's development. This explicitly privileges the social capital of the information channels, expectations and social norms of the middle-classes (Bellamy, 1994, Taylor & Mackay, 2008). Questions to reflect upon before applying for the development of a program also indicate the need for highly developed research, decoding and management skills, also the cultural domain of the middle-classes:

> Have you found books and information articles that support the alternative program?
> Does your idea meet the requirements of section 21 of the School Act?
> Have you examined the impact the alternative program may have on the school system?
> Have you considered unintentional consequences of this change?
> (Alternative Programs Handbook (website – retrieved December, 2006, p.6)

Where the growth of post-secondary education threatens the position of privilege for the middle-classes and creates the necessity to strategize for social closure (Ball, 2003) there are divisions even within the dominant class. Wacquant (2005) posits that while those with greater economic capital value education that fills the deficit of their cultural capital, those with greater cultural capital desire education that will provide the necessary skills to succeed financially in the market place (Swartz, 1997).

The use of capital is the use of power that can exact unwanted or unintended consequences upon others. For Bourdieu this power is not evenly distributed throughout the social realm, but "is concentrated in definite institutional sectors and given zones of social space" (Wacquant, 2005, p. 144). Fundamental to the use of capital is its relation to other species of capital within the social field, adjudicated for value by the competition and collusion of agents in the "operation of ever-longer and more complex circuits of legitimation ultimately vouchsafed by the state as the arbiter of the conflicts between contending capitals" (Wacquant, 2005, p. 144).

Symbolic Power/ Violence

It is assumed that school quasi-markets are rational choice schemes created and supported by the state under the presumption that individuals are responsible for and equally endowed with the requisite resources to steer their way through the complicated conduits of the system. This assumption serves only to enact symbolic violence against those without the appropriate cultural and economic capital to participate in the competition over educational resources (Brantlinger 2003).

In Salt Lake City, Buendia et al. (2004) examine how school technologies work to "inscribe spatial identities and define a particular cultural capital as valuable" (p. 184). By facilitating the adoption of practices, programs and technologies that seem to belong naturally in particular spaces and with particular types of students, teachers are able to "believe that they [do] not differentiate their curriculum based on deficit notions of students' race or class. Instead, the shorthand [allows] them to make distinctions based on what West Side or East Side students needed" (2004, p. 184). In Edmonton, instructional focus is mandated by EPSB for every school and often varies according to the perceived needs of students in a given socio-geographic area. Students in the 'North' end are more likely to receive 'literacy' or 'reading skills' as their instructional focus while 'South' side students are more likely to engage in 'inquiry' or 'critical thinking skills.' In this way specialization offered through the school system "legitimates the dominant social order by naturalizing social differences through the ideology of 'natural gifts' or through the allocation of scholastic qualification" (Poupeau, 2000, p. 71).

While choice as democratic praxis appears wholly virtuous and consistent with the aims of equity and justice, enacted as it is in school quasi-markets, choice disassembles communities through individualization and conceals its oppression under the guises of freedom.

> Symbolic power, that is, the capacity that systems of meaning and signification have of shielding, and thereby strengthening, relations of oppression and exploitation by hiding them under the cloak of nature, benevolence or meritocracy. And his sociology of "culture" then reveals itself for what it is in truth: a *political economy of symbolic violence*, of the imposition and inculcation of instruments of knowledge and construction of realty that are socially biased but unseen as such (Wacquant, 2005, p. 134).

Through the obfuscation produced by legitimation, symbolic violence also has the effect of manufacturing consent for domination since it is misrecognized as such (Poupeau, 2000). Acceptance of the 'natural' social order, or effects of social systems occurs through ideology and language to elicit the complicity of the dominated in their own domination (Poupeau, 2000). In school, symbolic violence is also enacted through pedagogy (a representation of ideology), which permeates the entire environment and functions to exclude children of the working classes. "What is inculcated at school is not so much knowledge that can be useful to the child but the value of the legitimacy of the dominant culture" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 49). Doxa is perhaps the strongest form of symbolic violence since it is the most blatant embodiment of the dominant order enacted through self-exclusion.

Limitations

Where Bourdieu is limited, however, is in his analysis of "a high positive correlation between objective possibilities and subjective aspirations" (Schwartz, 1997, p.

198) since there are well-documented cases to the contrary. For example, after World War Two, many African American students had high aspirations for a college education and nonetheless, found their opportunities lacking (Schwartz, 1997, p. 198). Similarly, his theory of the 'adaptive collusion' of the oppressed with the oppressors can be somewhat misplaced, given very public opposition of women, gay alliance members and minorities throughout history and around the world. The problem of ignoring such struggles can be extended to other areas of his work, including his limited allowance for agency and his pessimism regarding social change, as well as his position on the role of the state (Schwartz, 1997).

Because of his emphasis on the reproductive relationship between the field and habitus, it is clear that Bourdieu is not optimistic regarding the potential for change. In this equation, room for agency is limited by structural influences in such as way as to appear even to Bourdieu himself as potentially "hyperdeterminist" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 132). Further, his conception of habitus as being unconsciously driven has been criticized as unable to be verified or falsified (Everett 2002). However, Chambers (2005) declares the value of Bourdieu's work is in its ability to demonstrate not the impossibility, but the difficulty of change, and in this way, his work may be seen, not so much as cynical regarding change, but rather as a complex navigation system toward change.

Additionally, Bourdieu has been criticized for under-theorizing the role of the state as it relates to education. "Bourdieu speaks of the relative autonomy of the educational system to refer to its capacity to undermine government instituted reforms" (Swartz, 1997, p. 208). His positioning of education systems as relatively autonomous

social fields results in little analysis of the relationship of the state or special interest groups to the function of schooling (Swartz 1997). In my view, this is a significant limitation since primarily governing organizations hold the capacity for systemic transformation.

A fourth criticism of Bourdieu's work is related to the privileging of his own position, that is, the 'untouchable' perspective of the sociologist. In addition to demonstrating the way in which the middle-class habitus of teachers works through the regulations of the state to construct student identities and conditions of possibility, Beundia et al.'s (2004) project also inadvertently exemplifies a key criticism of Bourdieu's work. Just as the teachers in Salt Lake City and Edmonton defined working-class and minority students as lacking, Bourdieu "defines working-class habitus in a purely negative way as the realm of lack, as distanced from the cultural norm incarnated by the dominant classes" (Kauppi, 2000, p. 54). Ironically, through this description and the development of his class-based discourse, Bourdieu himself wields a symbolic domination over the very people he would purport to support since "the act of definition is itself an expression of power" (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p. 75). Both Jenkins (1992) and Webb et al. (2002) are critical of Bourdieu's notion that agents themselves cannot be aware of their own actions, and that only the scholar, now necessarily placed in a position of elevated rank, is "objective" enough to see the reality of things. While individuals' reports of their own practices may not demonstrate awareness of all influential factors or unintended outcomes, not recognizing their knowledge is tantamount to enacting the same symbolic violence upon them that researchers attempt to expose in others.

Finally Bourdieu has been criticized for under-theorizing family socialization in France, even though he premised much of his work in education on the family as a major site of inculcation and reproduction (Reed-Danahay, 2005). The same charge has been levied against him regarding secondary habitus acquired over the life course since other sites for inculcation exist, and he focused almost exclusively on schools in this capacity (Reed-Danahay, 2005).

From my perspective, the most perilous of these charges against Bourdieu is his defining of working classes solely in deficit terms and ignoring the resistances of minority groups. Both of these positions not only falsely represent the groups and the situations, but also enact exactly the same kind of symbolic violence that Bourdieu accuses the middle classes of wielding against less dominant groups. However, neither of these criticisms should impact this study because I am studying middle-class parents. Although Bourdieu does under theorize the role of the state in the reproduction of class boundaries and uneven capital distribution, I intend to avoid this problem by including the role of the district in my analysis. With respect to his lack of attention to family socialization, I feel that it doesn't necessarily impact the validity of Bourdieu's work on the role of education in social reproduction. He insightfully illuminated the production and reproduction of capital within schools and outlined a theory of sociology immanently useful to other scholars.

In an effort to expand upon Bourdieu's work, I draw on the work of those authors who have looked more specifically at the parental practices in the development of habitus (Reay, 2001; Ball, 2003; Reay et al, 2005). Finally, I don't agree with the assertion that Bourdieu's theory of reproduction is 'hyperdeterministic' because he made provisions for

the possibility of change both within the inculcation of habitus, such as secondary habitus and through the interaction of field, practice and habitus.

Paths Toward Transformation

Bourdieu was highly critical of what he called the "myth" of school as an equalizing force and declared this notion "the new opiate for the people" (1996 p. 5). Instead, he argued that educational systems serve to legitimate domination and that sociology was the path to uncovering the 'objective' truth of the social relations that lead to the reproduction of power (Reed-Danahay, 2005). There is no shortage of evidence that illustrates the nature of educational institutions as being "part of a larger universe of symbolic institutions that reproduce existing power relationships" (Bellamy, 1994, p. 122). In EPS's system, school choice is permeated with the ideology of 'giftedness' in specialized areas, (in the arts, academics, languages, science or sports) and legitimates the dominance of the middle-classes, by naturalizing the disparity of capital resources.

> The social practices of the middle-classes serve to maintain their dominance through their ability both to define the conditions of possibility and dictate the limits of action for the field of choice. It is their habitus that transforms necessity into strategy and creates choices and identities, which can only obtain their value in their relative position to others (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 296).

Although Bourdieu is highly critical of the notion that school can act as an equalizing or liberating force, he does outline some paths toward change. The capacity for change exists in the interaction of field, practice and habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Also, because symbolic capital in any field is foundationally arbitrary, there is always room for struggle over power relations, norms and definitions (Bourdieu, 2001). Finally, throughout his work Bourdieu wrote about three primary ways change can occur:

consciousness-raising, collective action and reflexivity. Obviously consciousness raising is only the first step toward transformation of social conditions and, therefore, requires some measure of collective action in order to exact some structural change.

This chapter sought to introduce and elaborate upon the theoretical tools I use to analyze the data of this study, including the field, practice, doxa, habitus and capital. Habitus is a particularly useful concept in making sense of parents' decision-making as well as for understanding the upper end of the agency continuum in terms of both potential and constraints within Edmonton's school quasi-market. Rather than creating a false binary of structure and agency, as though there were no overlap or interaction between the two, Bourdieu's habitus dissolves this binary by describing the field as embodied through habitus. Also, the notion of capitals provides a framework by which to analyze the variety of resources that parents draw upon in their attempts to secure 'the best' for their children. Specifically, the various species of cultural capital are most constructive in that they provide a way to understand disparities between classes as well as differences within them. Additionally, the idea that change occurs through the interaction of practice, habitus and the field is valuable in understanding how school choice has reconstructed parenting and how those new practices potentially affect the structure of field. In order to appreciate the perceptions and practices, or habitus of Edmonton's very active parents, I begin by looking at their own experiences in the field, since habitus is the field embodied.

CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS I

FIELD IMPACTS ON HABITUS

If we are to understand how parental preferences and perceptions influence their choice to send their children to particular pedagogical alternatives, we must examine the development of such preferences and perceptions. Because it is both historically and culturally produced, encoded through socializing and beginning in childhood, habitus is inculcated by experience as much, if not more, than by explicit teaching (Jenkins, 1992). Thus, parents' educational histories must be viewed as influential in the development of their habitus since these experiences demonstrate how the field becomes embodied.

As a result of the field's power structures becoming embodied, habitus operates *in part* at the level of the subconscious, working through people's dispositions and activities. In this way, 'habitus' provides for agency as it theorizes the agent while 'field' theorizes structure (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p. 30-31). In an effort to begin to determine the potentials and limitations of agency in Edmonton's quasi-market, this chapter investigates the development and 'changeability' of active parents' habitus.

Field Experiences

Symbolic Violence and Parents' Past Educational Experiences

> *It is memories of the past and expectations of the future that govern our choices.* (Schwartz, 2005, p. 52).

Parents' preferences for particular educational programs appear to be due, in part, to the experiences of their past working through them as embodied social structures (Reay, 1998b). The dispositions and activities that comprise the habitus have been comprised through socializing since early childhood. Many parents cited negative

experiences in their own education as reasons for choosing the particular pedagogical alternative their child was currently attending. One parent of the traditional program described her educational experience with reserved disdain:

> I can remember being the experiment as far as the teaching styles went when I was going through…Um in high school… social was taught in the child led, the student led way…it was all so nothing you could really grab at, it's all up in the air. You're never really sure if it's right or not because nobody ever tells you if it's right or wrong (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

A parent from Carob Hill suggested that abuses incurred by her husband in school, had some bearing on their choice of program.

> Nuns taught him and it was very… I can't think of the word even…he didn't have too much of a sense of creativity at all in the classes… they told him to draw a picture with a black crayon, just scribble it on the page kind of thing and said, "Well that's the colour of your soul" kind of thing (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007).

Parents from both alternative programs described this kind of symbolic violence during their own schooling and each blamed 'public school' pedagogy for their experiences. Thus, participants from each program conceived of their chosen program not only as distinct from public education, but also as its pedagogical opposite. That is, parents of the child-led program conceived of 'public' education as largely traditional, and parents of the traditional program conceived of 'public' education as largely child-led. Nellie (Ergo Sum) also described bullying as a part of her own schooling experiences. By choosing a program with "strong discipline," she was hoping to protect her children from the same painful experiences (May, 2007).

Occupations also informed parents' choice of educational programming. Lynn, a Carob Hill parent, has a child with special needs. She cited both her brother's experience in school (also with special needs) as well as her job as a social worker as the reasons she "knew from the get go that traditional school wasn't going to work." On the other hand,

Sally said that her experiences working in a school outside the city as a library technician, "cemented" her beliefs that the pedagogical approach characteristic of Ergo Sum was "the way education should be" (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 007).

> …it's truly appalling to me that we have kids, I have kids in grade twelve, that cannot write a properly constructed sentence, that cannot spell, that cannot do math, that, you know… their hand writing is atrocious. (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 007).

Where parents had fond memories of their own schooling, a public or "regular"-alternative distinction was still maintained, since their education had taken place, either out of country, or in an alternative program in Edmonton. A parent of the Ergo Sum program describes her childhood education in another country as superior to her education in Canada. Sally moved to Canada when she was in grade three, but found that her traditional schooling out-of-country had prepared her for grade four in Canada. She made several direct correlations between her own schooling (before moving to Canada) and her preference for the Ergo Sum program. Although not every school that houses the Ergo Sum program requires students to wear uniforms, one of Sally's primary considerations was that her children wear uniforms since "uniform schools were the standard" during the early days of her own education. Although Sally spent most of her childhood in Canada, every Ergo Sum participant in this study mentioned the preference for the program by more recent immigrants from India, Pakistan, Asia and Eastern Europe. When asked to speculate about why Ergo Sum might appeal to new Canadians, Sally referenced the importance of familiarity:

> It's probably a comfort level for them that the uniform is there, and that's similar to their school experiences, and it's a model that's very disciplined and very academic, and that's probably very similar to their experiences as well (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

In an interview with new Canadians from Eastern Europe, parents described the easy fit they felt with the program, saying that it was similar to how they were raised and that the program used a Russian developed math program. This may be one of the reasons that out of 16 children in their child's classroom, they reported that seven are Russian. One mother from the same program summed up the similarities among parents in the program:

> I think we usually all share that we like a structured atmosphere. We want our children to sort of learn, I suppose like we learned, in a way. In a type of classroom where we learned in where the desks were in rows and the teacher would speak, and we would have respect for the teacher, for the school that we had when we were little (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Familiar and appealing to many of the parents in the Ergo Sum program was the degree of what parents termed "discipline". One parent said, "a disciplined environment was more conducive to learning." For those parents who were educated (even briefly) outside of Canada, comparisons of the quality of primary programming that they experienced as a child were very comfortably made when choosing an alternative program in Edmonton. Perhaps because democratic values of equality of provision were not the norm in the country of Sally's first two years of schooling, she used the degree of distinction the program would offer for her children, when compared with other elementary programs as a criterion for choice. Given that she only experienced this mode of schooling for a very short time, her strong preference for an education of the same type for her own children points heavily to the profound role of childhood experiences in the inculcation of habitus.

Although most parents in the Carob Hill program reported negative schooling experiences, Jennifer recalls her own alternative schooling fondly, saying that she

remembers "a lot of freedom and happiness." So, where parent's own schooling experiences were positive, they sought to reproduce them for their own children and where they were negative, they naturally looked to another option in an effort to save their children similar experiences; however, some parents made declarations with no evidence for experience or research to support their claims. For example, parents from Eastern Europe said that one of their reasons for choosing the Ergo Sum program was because they knew that Canadian students educated in regular programs have "trouble later on in university because they cannot keep up with the amount of work [and] don't know how to study" (Lisa, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Jennifer was opposed to sending her child to a split Kindergarten, grade one class, believing that she would be "lost" and "bored" and so decided to look "for something better" (Carob Hill, May 2007). She acknowledged the irony of the program she ultimately chose having mixed- age groupings, but immediately dismissed the ability of a 'public' classroom to manage the similar situation effectively.

Mothers of both pedagogical alternatives reported academic success in their own education. Their confidence and entitlement in relation to their child's education was easily translated from their own achievements. This supports Reay's (2005) and Brantlinger's (2003) findings where Brantlinger (2003) describes parents active in their children's education as speaking about their own education with "nostalgia and pride" (p. 40). These parents were contrasted in Brantlinger's (2003) study with less affluent parents who had greater difficulty negotiating involvement. Participants in this study indicated similar feelings of confidence in their academic histories.

> My husband has a philosophy degree (Shrugs, gesturing, laughing) so he's a thinker (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007).

> My schooling was different in that I just simply tried to get the really good grades. I was always trying to please my parents with good grades and this sort of thing (Kelly, Carob Hill; May 2007).

This begins to construct a choice habitus and reinforces the notion that parents choose, not by rational and objective weighing of all the information, but by following their instincts or practical sense, based on their own educational habitus to make culturalist decisions (Bourdieu, 1990). The preference to directly reproduce the values and behaviour of the family was made clear by all of the parents in this study. As well, parents' own educational successes contributed to their embodiment of dominant educational structures, which translated into confidence in navigating their children's education. Where institutional habitus was not consistent with family habitus, parents removed their children in search of a better match.

Child's Past Educational Experiences

Bad for Child

Just over half of the participants in this study had previously been enrolled in other programs before they settled on the program they were currently attending, and all but one of those parents removed their children as a result of unhappy relations with the previous school. Lucy, pointed out that experiencing another program before entering Ergo Sum, served to clarify what she could and could not "deal with" in her children's schooling. Defining such boundaries was evident in the reports of other participants; however, many parents ultimately chose programs that included elements they had repelled from in previous schools.

Like Reay's (2005) study, one mother resisted a construction of herself as her child's teacher. Before switching to Ergo Sum, Annie's daughter (Ronda) attended her local school. When Annie expressed concern with Ronda's reading progress, Ronda's teacher assured Annie that her daughter would eventually learn to read the words about which Annie was concerned. Annie taught her daughter a phonetic rule, which made her learning more explicit and aided her in her reading. Annie resented having to teach her daughter the phonetic rule, and thus it became one of the reasons she withdrew her daughter from the program. In Reay's study (2005) "this ambivalence about assuming a teaching role was rooted in mothers' differential access to dominant cultural capital" (p. 33), which is consistent with Annie's narrative, since her highest level of education was grade ten. Ironically, she ultimately chose a program that required parents to sign a commitment to helping their children with homework.

In some cases, lax discipline became a euphemism for limited success in a previous program. Exactly like a parent in Brantlinger's (2003) study who complained of a "lack of academic push" for her children "who are smart, but not motivated to work on their own" (Bratinger, 2003, p 49), Lucy describes her son "copying down the answers" during group work at an inquiry-based school as a reason for switching to Ergo Sum's 'academic' program. Nellie also cited her child's behaviour as a reason for choosing Ergo Sum, saying she was looking for:

> …something where he would have to work to get the marks I guess because he was very active and he can get bored, and then he'd start to kind of act up so we wanted him to be constantly working and challenged. He wasn't like an academic challenge student we knew that (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Although pedagogy was the primary determinant for program withdrawal for Ergo Sum parents, Carob Hill parents removed their children due to the teaching staff's

relationship with their children. Thus, each group valued the inculcation of different forms of capital. Ergo Sum pedagogy is consistent with the inculcation of cultural capital, both embodied and institutionalized, and the primacy Carob Hill parents placed on relationships reflects an interest in the development of social capital in the form of membership through obligations and symbols to secure boundaries and develop a sense of belonging.

Although many of the parents in this program previously home-schooled their children, some mothers did enroll their children in mainstream programs prior to Carob Hill. Since Barb ultimately chose a program with a purposeful non-emphasis on academics, it is surprising that she refers to an academic measure of her child when describing her experiences with another program.

> She was an early reader. She was bored. The teacher didn't even know her reading level. I don't think she knew anything about [child's name] and she wasn't a bad teacher. In fact many people thought quite highly of her (Barb, Carob Hill, May 2007).

Another parent reported "awful issues," elaborating only that "it wasn't student led at all" as reasons for withdrawing her children from a private progressive school and moving to home-schooling (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007).

When Carob Hill closed down for a year, parents of this program were forced to enroll their children in other schools. After meeting with the teacher at the end of the year to discuss her concerns, Jennifer described her feelings: "All year he was in your class, and you don't know him. It was hard." Lynn complained that the project-based alternative program she enrolled her child in when Carob Hill closed down, had a "lack of understanding" when it came to the limitations of her son.

In addition to direct experiences, parents drew on the histories of friends and family members to inform their decisions. Lynn talked about the pressure schools feel to get results from students at the expense of their spiritual well being. Drawing on her brother's history as well as the experiences of children she worked with as a social worker, Lynn describes Carob Hill as a place where students are not labeled and are not made to feel deficient in anyway if they have limitations or particular needs. From these stories, it is clear that the influence of school experience is a powerful factor in parent decisions.

Bad for Parent

One parent spoke at length about the way negative experiences she herself encountered at her children's previous school impacted her decision to enroll her children at Ergo Sum. After a new principal "redid some things according to a philosophy that she (the principal) was led to believe worked really well" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007), Annie became disconcerted with the unfamiliar child-centered practices. "I never head of that before. You call them year one and two. You mix them together where they sit in groups" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). She also felt patronized by the way administration minimized phonics, saying that she felt "talked down to" when she was told there were only a few words she needed to work on phonetically with her children.

> Sure, I'm not a teacher I'm not a principal and I expect them to know more than me, but from sort of all the things I had been reading and I thought no I don't think I need this. It was not - I didn't think it was presented very nicely (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

For Annie, the lack of consistency between the school's institutional habitus and her own was a source of great discord. Citing Bernstein (1975), Reay et al. (2005) describe

institutional habitus as a combination of elements "most notably curriculum offer, organizational practices and … cultural and expressive characteristics. These latter aspects, the "expressive order" of the school, include expectations, conduct, character and manners" (p. 37). The changes made by the new principal were foreign to Annie's own schooling experience.

> …looking back to when I went to school and then thinking why are they doing it this way or how come this isn't being taught or how they're doing that or this doesn't make sense (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

The discordant experiences many of these parents encountered with their own or their children's education illustrates both that "habitus is history turned into nature" (Bellamy, 1994, p. 126) and that the educational field may be viewed as a "field of struggles" (Bellamy 1994, p. 128). Since capital is the object of struggle within a given field (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2002), these stories also point to differences in the types of capital parents value.

Good for Child – Wanting Something 'More'

While negative experiences with their children's school led some parents to switch enrollment to an alternative program, positive past experiences were also given as reasons for choosing a particular pedagogical alternative. Attending a Montessori program led Nellie, a mother from the Ergo Sum program, "wanting something more than a regular program, because they learn more at Montessori." So while some parents move away from programs they view as detrimental to their children, or discordant with their own educational histories, others move towards pedagogical alternatives, primarily as a means to secure their child's educational advantage.

> Well, because [Ergo Sum] is – even if you're say in grade eight, you're doing grade nine work. Like you're, you're actually ahead of everybody else. And I, and for a while there I thought well, is that really true and then I had somebody move to uh, Saskatchewan, I think is where they moved to and they were like oh wow you know we're so far ahead and I'm thinking okay (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007)

Such sentiments clearly illustrate that some parents perceive a hierarchy of schools, even though they are all under the 'public' school umbrella. Because "high and low positions are interdependent and juxtaposed" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 39), when parents – compelled by the system of choice – seek out 'something more' for their children, they are simultaneously ensuring that someone else's children have something less.

Lisa and Mark were swayed, not as much by trying to secure an advantage for their children, as they were by a combination of their cultural community and the district's decision to accommodate weekend Russian language classes in a school that also houses an Ergo Sum program. Even though they described the staff at their daughter's previous school as "perfect people" who "helped a lot," Mark and Lisa switched from a Catholic school, to the traditional program after they moved and after they had already been taking their daughter to Russian classes in that building for almost a year. Each of the reports regarding children's past educational experiences were consistent with their parents own educational histories; thus, no observation can be made of the malleability of habitus. However, Lisa and Mark's recounting of their schooling experiences in Russia, as well as their children's experiences in Edmonton, provide a different perspective.

HABITUS

Ambivalence and Habitus

As 'new Canadian' preferences developed alongside their Russian childhood habitus, Mark and Lisa appeared to be rather ambivalent at times. Sometimes happy with their decision to attend Ergo Sum, they reported, "[Ergo Sum] sounds like where we go so I would say it's just great." Other times, their narratives contained contradictions, describing "just regular school" as "playful," but then complaining that one Ergo Sum teacher didn't "give the kids any way to express themselves" (June, 2007). Even though Mark and Lisa found the staff at the Catholic school their daughter had originally been enrolled in, "more gentle and kind," they still found themselves compelled to attend Ergo Sum because they believed it was a more "academic" school and that strict and traditional teaching practices were "the same in [their-Russian] school system." Although Brantlinger (2003) asserts that middle-class parents "displayed a dissonance between their class epistemology and desired liberal identity" (p. 59), Mark and Lisa's vacillating reports are the result of their primary habitus being informed by a Canadian habitus," the origin of which can be traced to elements such as "national discourses, school culture, peers and the mass media" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 59). Interestingly, since Mark and Lisa chose a program for their children which correlates well with their primary habitus, the development of this secondary 'Canadian' habitus must be attributed to something other than school culture, such as national discourses or mass media.

> The Catholic school was more… the people were more gentle and kind. They were trying to understand you and here it's just this is the rule, do not question… (Lisa, Ergo Sum, June 2007).

Then, later in the interview, Lisa contradicts this statement and appears to support the rule oriented Ergo Sum philosophy:

> If he's questioning something about a test, like he doesn't understand something they're starting, it's okay. I want him to be this way. If he questioned the rules, why we cannot play snowballs outside and the teacher gives, "it's the rules," it's the rules. That's it. Done (Lisa, Ergo Sum, June 2007).

Both Mark and Lisa made comparisons between cultures with Mark, saying that in Canada, healthy, happy living was valued, where as in Russia "you have to work hard to do something, be someone in your life." Lisa pointed out a discrepancy between volunteerism in Russia and the kind of volunteering done by parents of the Ergo Sum program, saying that only "mandatory" volunteering was done in Russia, and that parents volunteering at the school was "completely unusual and abnormal for our country" (Lisa, Ergo Sum, June 2007). Attempting to simultaneously make sense of Canadian customs and maintain their heritage caused these parents to continually reassess their positions and expectations with regard to their children's education, sometimes creating contradictions in the process. Swartz (1997) suggests that, "in situations where opportunities and constraints of fields change gradually, habitus tends to adapt, though there will be some degree of 'mismatch' (p. 213).

Other parents expressed some uncertainty with the progression leading up to their decision to place their child in an alternative program.

> I don't know if you know what you're looking for, you know, to be honest, at the time with your oldest child. I uh... it was a welcoming enough environment and ended up being information that I needed (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May, 2007).

This comment underlines the importance of parental experience both before and during the choice process. Open houses provide information that doesn't point to a rational process of choice with checks and balances, but instead to "the functioning of "practical sense" or cultural norms, "strategies *devoid of strategic design*" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 108).

Institutional Habitus(Open Houses)

Mothers overwhelming reported their experiences at Open Houses or school visits to be the most influential factor in their final choice of school program. Consistent with Ball's (1990) study, many described a 'feeling' that told them that particular program was the one they were, or were not looking for. Nellie describes a charter school, specializing in music instruction, that she visited during her choice process:

> The private school cost was one of the big issues and I don't know I just didn't like the atmosphere in the school…I thought it was kind of a very arrogant atmosphere (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

This illustrates a difference between Nellie's class habitus and the institutional habitus she encountered at the charter school. Clearly, even active, middle class parents can experience a doxic form of self-selection (see p. 104) when confronted with an environment not consistent with their habitus.

Also describing a 'feeling,' Sally said that during her pre-enrollment visit to Ergo Sum, she was 'struck' by the "fantastic" discipline. When her friends have commented on how strict the school is, she reports saying that in her home country, they had inspections to ensure they were wearing uniformed underwear, so by comparison, Ergo Sum was relaxed. Annie recalled a similar harmony between her individual habitus and school ethos when, after visiting many schools, she thought it was "cool" to find a school that "brought back memories."

> And I'm going, 'okay this is it.' I didn't even know what the philosophy was. I knew it was sort of academic, but just from what I could see right away….It felt good and I said, 'yes this is what I'm looking for' (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Jennifer recalled with fondness stories told by parents at a Carob Hill open house about their involvement and philosophy of schooling, saying that she had been searching for a

way to "be more active in the classroom," even though she had young children at home (Jennifer, Carob Hill, May 2007). This is a contrast to Annie's account, in that Jennifer was seeking a program based, in part, on particular personal constraints. From this we can see that even very active parents bring different levels of awareness and have different degrees of constraints that inform their choice process, an important point to be attentive to since these differences contribute to the unequal relations of power in quasi-markets. Jennifer also describes "a feeling" around the ethos of the parents, and by proxy, the school.

> Yeah it was a feeling, it was like they were so passionate. They were cool, and there were so many things going on. A feeling, but Bob [her husband] really liked them as well, like that helped too, like it wasn't just me (Jennifer, Carob Hill, May 2007).

The same inclinations that led parents to feel comfortable or uncomfortable when they visited programs also informed their perceptions of themselves, other parents and their children's future.

PERCEPTIONS

Field Impacts Parenting

Mothers from both programs constructed themselves as 'the good parent' in relation to an 'other.' Through their embodiment of the quasi-market, participants identified themselves and their mothering with the school system. Because making one choice means not making another, the choices these mothers made were presented as 'the right' choice for good parenting, thus rendering the 'other' choice less adequate.

> Rhetorical mechanisms or mystifying ideologies that allow inequities, discriminatory practices, and class advantages to remain invisible appear to play a

> symbolically mediating role in preserving positive social identity (Ricoeur, 1986, pp. xvi-xix).

For example, Sally's rhetorical sentiment, "I like to be active, I like to be involved, I like to take on some of the responsibility" constructs 'other' less active parents as being less responsible, thus allowing Sally to maintain her 'good parent' self image (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Lynn also perceived a relationship between parenting identity and school choice saying, "I think that it's been very healing for some parents to be able to relate to their children academically without that stigma of bad parenting, or you must have done something wrong." Competition and distinction was evident in many of the parents' pursuits to "make sure that their child [got] the best education they can possibly get" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). When Barb was asked to comment about what parents had in common at Carob Hill, her answer revealed a similar distinction to that made by Ergo Sum parents:

> Attachment parenting is a big one. Not everybody I suppose, but most. Most parents are very close with their children. Most of the parents put a lot of time and energy in to their kids, and are willing to bend over backwards to have them have positive experiences, and don't expect teachers to do everything for them (Barb, Carob Hill, June 2007).

This construction of the 'good parent' is similar to Brantlinger's (2003) finding that parents "own identity formation was based on their children's school status" (p. 59).

Good Parents and "Other" Parents

> *What seems intuitively clear, however, is how much more extensive the responsibilities of motherhood are becoming as motherhood moves from appearing to be an intimate, private and personal responsibility to being performed as a public and profoundly political responsibility at all levels within education* (David, 2005, p. 20)

Whereas the mother's in Brantlinger's (2003) study "wanted to avoid a pushy, selfish or elitist image," yet still desired to have their children distinguished through educational programming, this study's participants were more forthcoming in their school choice narratives. An Ergo Sum mother positioned not only *her* choice, but also the exercising of choice in general as superior parenting relative to parents who choose their community school.

> You know there are still the parents who are just like you know this is the neighbourhood school. This is where they go to. They don't go anywhere else. They don't check everything out. So this is just where you're going to go because it's the, you know convenient place for me (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

"Counseling out," refers to convincing already enrolled students to leave the school and "steering away," describes discouraging students at the pre-enrollment phase (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 94). Even the influence of school staff in "counseling out" students (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99) was framed as a natural consequence of low commitment on the part of lesser parents.

> Parents have chosen to go to a different program… have chosen to go to mainstream or whatever and I think that's a conversation that's had between administrations and teachers who are saying that this might not be the program for your child or daughter, but I think a lot of it is more parent driven than administration driven because there's a lot of parent commitment (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

This construction of parenting creates a mystifying ideology (Thompson, 1990) that normalizes inequity, and by contrast, colours those who have 'chosen' to remain in the program and provide 'a lot of parent commitment' as morally upstanding, superior parents (Brantlinger, 2003).

Construction of the Child: Imagined Futures

Dominance and Peer Groups

> *There are many things that all of us (staff, parents and community) can do - must do - to make the future for our children.* (Ergo Sum website)

Bourdieu emphasized the importance of embedded forms of pedagogy and inculcation that contributed to the development of "students who would assume dominant positions in society" (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 50). Parents in this study appeared to understand the power of the inculcation of a particular habitus in their children's future success.

> Yeah and in the school I would want them to be going to… it's unfortunate that there are different social areas in Edmonton and some schools unfortunately just have better even mainstream programs than other schools simply because of the economic demographic that happens to be at that school (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Reporting a preference for high socio economic status (SES) schools exhibits a candor uncommon in the accounts of other participants, but Sally distances herself from responsibility for educational disparity by underwriting the influence of structural elements, such as housing and program placement. Consistent with Brantlinger's (2003) analysis, participants from both alternative programs articulated difference in the quality of educational programs "in ways that [were] not attributed to their own desires or actions" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 21). Most parents never mentioned student demographics as influencing their decision-making; however, there were indications that parent decisions were heavily influenced by peer group selection (Adnett and Davies, 2002). Lynn (Carob Hill) described the perceptions of some Carob Hill parents.

> The other reality is there's a core group of parents who spend all day there everyday and they don't want to be responsible for more kids that have shown up this year that have behaviour problems. That's not what they envisioned for their kids (June 2007)

University

Although parents tried to avoid the appearance of elitism in their accounts of school choice, they ultimately betrayed its importance in transmitting crucial cultural capital to their children. Nellie was careful to point out that the Ergo Sum program was for "normal children," but "very seldom do kids not go into either International Bacheloriate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP)" when they reach Junior or Senior High (May, 2007). Most of the Ergo Sum parents mentioned the place of university in their children's imagined futures. Carob Hill parents, on the other hand, only addressed university when confronted with a direct question. Jennifer (Carob Hill) reveals a position of security in her own cultural capital when asked about her son's future:

> I know for a fact that a lot of really amazing universities recruit in the home schooling communities. Like Yale and Harvard seek out students that home school because they're taught how to think, not just how to write good tests. So, no, I'm not worried about that because whatever he wants to do, we'll find out what he needs to get there (June, 2007).

Barb (Carob Hill) said that she and her husband "hadn't really talked deeply about it," but believed her children would attend university (Carob Hill, May 2007). This aloof response points to the safety her own capital provided her, and thus she clearly saw no need to strategize early on in order to prepare her children for their futures. There were differences in the way these groups perceived the role of school in their children's future. One mother Ergo Sum mother tied education to a desire for economic capital by saying school was a means by which to "get into whatever career you choose." Mark was more direct in expressing his motivation for social mobility:

> Well kids should always do better than their parents. He should have at least the same education that we have so if we would have just college or I don't know something else, I guess we might consider the same education for him, but right

> now we want him to have the same education we have (Mark, Ergo Sum, June 2007).

These differences indicate discrepancies between groups in terms of both the capitals they possess and the capitals they value. Ergo Sum parents placed greater value on institutional cultural capital, and economic capital Ergo Sum and Carob Hill parents also differed in their perceptions of the relationship between schooling and careers.

Economy & Careers

One of Ergo Sum's founding statements declares the purpose of education, and thus the "fundamental goal and objective" of the program to be "that students acquire the attitudes, knowledge, skills and training necessary for success in a rapidly emerging global economy" (EPSB, 1995). Ergo Sum describes its program as one that "prepares students for a wide range of future academic, professional, and skilled employment opportunities" (Ergo Sum Parent Handbook Web Site).

> It won't just happen it has to be instilled in them and it's instilled in them through the school and I think there is, my experience is - my thoughts are that if we don't start expecting that from our youth of today Canadian economy is going to be just brutal in the future because we will not be able to compete globally with other countries…(Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Connecting school pedagogy to children's future successes in the workforce widens the scope of school choice, thus increasing the perception of risk. Once again, parents constructed other forms of schooling in opposition to their position, saying that other schools were not preparing students to be an "efficient, excellent work force" (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007). With no evidence to indicate that Ergo Sum does a better job than

any other program (mainstream or otherwise), at preparing children for future employment, participants believed in the program's ability to mitigate the risks of an unknown future.

Although Carob Hill's official 'guiding principles' don't relate their program to future employment prospects, it does purport to create "confident, reflective, self-directed individuals" (Carob Hill website). This description is consistent with one mother's desire for her children's future occupations: "I would love them to be, if they want to be, entrepreneurial because there's so much freedom in that" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007). Because entrepreneurship is often less secure than professional sector jobs, Jennifer's aspiration points to a feeling of protection due to her high levels of cultural capital. Additionally, Carob Hill's student-led pedagogy supports the development of a cultural capital congruent with an entrepreneurial lifestyle.

Belfield and Levin (2005) offer an explanation for such differences between these parents, with their assertion that families "prepare their children for occupational success by transmitting the values and behaviours of their own occupations" (Belfield & Levin, 2005, p. 74). According to this finding, working-class parents emphasize "conformity, obedience, following rules and reluctance to challenge authority," while professional parents encourage their children "to challenge authority, negotiate and consider options" (Belfield & Levin, 2005, p. 74). Because parents from both programs held white collar and blue-collar jobs, it's not possible to generalize reasons for differences based on occupation; however, discrepancies between programs may be the result of parents' *perceptions* of risk and their ability to mitigate against it. Further, regardless of occupation, neither set of parents could be classified as "working class" in terms of the

capital they accessed, such as the confidence of embodied cultural capital, and the economic cultural capital to cover costs of transportation, school fees and supplementing extra curricular activities. Another similarity between groups was in their desire to distinguish themselves from 'others,' which may be a further component of the choice habitus.

What Doesn't Inform Parents' Decisions?

What is perhaps most interesting with regard to the role of information in the choice processes of active parents is what *doesn't* inform their decisions. Contrary to rational choice theories that assume parents will access available information such as program availability or achievement results, the participants in this study indicated otherwise. Only one parent said that they had accessed information on the Internet, and none of the parents, including those in the Ergo Sum program, accessed provincial achievement results before making their decision. One parent from that program said, "I didn't even know what they were, and they really kept talking about their achievement tests and every year they would be sent home" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). This is contrary to Maguire's (2007) finding that 62% of parents reported checking annual reports on school performance,

Knowledge of other programs played a minimal role in Lucy's choice of program. When first confronted with the obligation to choose, she said, "We didn't realize everybody had so many different philosophies. You know, some people believe in free structure and the more Montessori idea" (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Although

participants from the Ergo Sum program made mention of the cultural diversity in the program, it was not a contributing factor in their initial decision-making.

Parent vs. Child Preference

Aside from the formal binary, parents from both alternative programs were greatly informed by their own interests and attitudes in their choice of program, rather than their child's. Lucy admits that she is "more of a practical" person, saying, "tell me what needs to be done, let's not discuss the meaning" (Ergo Sum, May 2007). This disposition is consistent with the information-based, rote-learning characteristic of Ergo Sum. Describing her children's reaction after being moved from their community school to [Ergo Sum], she said, "they didn't argue. They weren't happy about it, but they understood" (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007) As an artist, Jennifer herself had attended a fine arts alternative program in high school and been "immersed" in a school environment of "artistic freedom and expression" (Carob Hill, June, 2007), which translated into seeking a similar environment for her children. Another mother from Carob Hill indicated that the flexibility it offered her as a parent was an important factor in her decision to send her child to that program saying, "There was no way I could have my child in school on such nice days" (Kelly, May 2007).

> There's a tremendous amount of flexibility. You don't have to go to school right on time. My daughter would like to be on time. We had a big fight this morning, She would like to be there right when the meeting begins in the morning and I'm hanging up laundry at home and doing things that I don't normally have time to do (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007).

In this case, even though Carob Hill is child-led, Kelly's decision to send her children there was

not.

> She was just this past week, I was sort of a bit shocked she wants just to go to regular school, homework school she calls it. I'm like do you really know what it's like at homework school? I don't know if you'd really like that.
>
> *So are you considering putting her in a homework school?*
>
> No, I wouldn't, not right now (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007).

Although Kelly cited watching her first child always being "off on her own" "in a very structured gym class" as the reason she sought alternative education in the beginning, she, along with all of this study's participants, never mentioned the identities or personalities of her child as factors in her choice of school. Thus, active parents don't use their intimate knowledge of their children to match personalities and work styles to particular programs, but instead appeared to choose programs that reproduce the habitus and capitals of their family.

Summary

This chapter addressed the following research questions:

- Why do active parents choose particular pedagogical programs?
- What informs their decision?
- How do active parents view their role in their children's education?

Parents choose schools, not based on a rational and objective weighing of all the information, but instead follow their instincts or practical sense, based on their own and their children's educational history to make culturalist decisions (Bourdieu, 1990). Most parents did not access written information from the district or elsewhere, including achievement results, and only one referenced using the Internet as a resource while choosing. They perceived a hierarchy of schools and mentioned "wanting something more" for their child. The habitus of active parents indicated the embodiment of dominant educational structures, which translated into confidence in navigating their

children's education as well as in their construction of themselves as 'the good parent' in relation to a lesser 'other' parent. Where institutional habitus was not consistent with family habitus, parents removed their children in search of a better match. Nearly all of the participants maintained their primary habitus throughout their experiences with their children's education; however recent Russian-Canadians demonstrated the 'changeability' of habitus through the development of secondary habitus.

Even within these groups of active parents, mothers brought different levels of awareness to and managed varying levels of constraints within the choice process. There were also differences between groups in the types of capital they wanted to instill in their children. Ergo Sum parents sought the inculcation of cultural capital, particularly institutional cultural capital as well as economic capital and Carob Hill parents valued social capital. Although some differences between groups have been illuminated, and the construction of habitus investigated, this is not enough to understand the limitations and potentials of agency in Edmonton's quasi market. This chapter examined the development of active parents' habitus, including the way in which the field becomes embodied through experience. Because, in Bourdieu's model, change can only occur through practice, which is "the intersection of habitus and fields" (Swartz, 1997, p. 213), a closer look at the objective structures of the field is necessary.

CHAPTER 6 - ANALYSIS II

FIELD FENCES - THE STRUCTURAL LIMITATIONS OF POLICY

While habitus does account for parental preference, it is in no way tantamount to providing support for a rationalist perception of choice. Vincent and Martin (2005) suggest that conceptions of middle class agency should be challenged, "by pointing to the ways institutions can block parental assertions" (p. 114). For most of the parents in this study, admissions criteria, "counseling out" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99), district transportation policy and district control of information, advertising and program placement were manageable obstacles; however their recounting indicates an awareness that this is not the case for everyone. Thus, for parents lacking the appropriate capital, the field of choice can ironically become a narrow path constructed for them by insurmountable obstacles.

Admissions Criteria and Waiting List

From the beginning of the choice process parents can encounter difficulties. One Ergo Sum mother encountered waiting lists at a Catholic school close to their home, and another found that a charter school she was considering also had a waiting list. In both cases, these mothers initially accepted Ergo Sum in part by default due to structural constraints and not through a careful weighing of costs and benefits. Programs may also impose entrance criteria such as exams and interviews in order to select students. The Ergo Sum program requires every student entering the program (including Kindergarten) to write a test in order to determine whether or not he or she is at grade level.

> Right and now at [Name of School] they actually have them write a test. I think it's that HLAT test or provincial test to see if they're at a level, the classroom level because that principal found that some kids weren't quite at the level so they

> didn't keep up in the classroom, so that's when he actually had them write a test. A test for placement, that's what he calls it a placement test (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

The program also requires families to take part in an interview prior to admission. Parents reported being asked why they were choosing the program, as well as having the 'rules' and 'regulations' explained to them and being asked if this was consistent with their beliefs. A similar interview takes place as part of the 'intake process' of Carob Hill. If students are accepted to the program, at two of the Ergo Sum sites, parents are required to purchase uniforms for their children, and as one parent points out, "the uniforms might be expensive if you're a very low income family, but I think we try and…work that out" (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Counseling Out/ Doxic Self-Selection

It is easy to see how some parents can be 'directed' through such intake processes to 'choose' another program for their children when administration doesn't find them suitable for the program. In their work with disadvantaged families, Reay et al. (2002, 2005) found that the choice process for such families involved "finding out what you cannot have, what is not open for negotiation and then selecting from a few options left" (2005, p. 59). Self-exclusion or doxa not only naturalizes the selection process, but also represents the strongest form of symbolic violence since it is the embodiment of the 'natural' social order (Bourdieu, 1996). Although this was not the case for most of the parents in this study, many reported it as an experience of 'other' parents attempting to access the programs.

In some cases, students already enrolled in the Ergo Sum program were 'counseled out' by staff members.

> Like we actually…there's a series of tests that we have. I think it takes about an hour that we have prospective students go through, and at the end of the like you know test we'll say okay you know what, you'd probably be okay be able to enter grade three and with a little bit of hard work you'd be okay. Or we'd say okay you know what, you're just not going to make it. You're going to find the program too hard (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Thus, selection becomes naturalized through 'school choice,' "strengthening relations of oppression and exploitation by hiding then under the cloak of nature, benevolence or meritocracy," (Wacquant 2005, p. 134) subjecting the 'unchosen' to symbolic violence and domination. Tinney (1983) describes three types of bias: individual (prejudice and stereotyping), institutional (structural inequities) and collective (normative). 'Counseling out', a practice condoned and promoted by the district, can be described as institutional bias, a practice easily enacted since "the institutional customs within and outside schools that locate some students in disadvantageous positions are rarely visible (as bias) to dominant group members" (Corson, 1992). When describing limitations others might experience in trying to access the program, Annie described several circumstances under which the program would not be 'a good fit.'

> Um, they say it's for a 'normal' child who's prepared to work. Okay? Not like an academic challenge program…now they have interview… Which I think it isn't bad. I think yeah, because there may be some kids who honestly it's not a good fit for them. Maybe they have some learning issues that maybe the parents aren't aware of and so administrators and people that are trained in that need to see that and (inaudible) overall if you're maybe ESL depending how fluent you are that could be an issue especially because we move along fairly quickly. We have to cover Alberta curriculum plus more um, or even people when they're in the meeting this morning *(with district personnel)* they were talking about kids coming in um, like refugees who aren't even good at their own language and that's becoming a real problem trying to get them educated properly because they just don't understand period (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Inherent in this description is a "less than normal other" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 38), who is unable to access the same superior schooling as these families. Yet, under the guises of

admissions criteria, unequal access is normalized, and those students who don't 'make the cut' are naturally relegated to 'lesser' schools. 'Lesser,' since by virtue of the fact that some schools are selective and others not, a hierarchy is created within the system, that at the very least creates the *appearance* of superiority of some over others. One Ergo Sum mother would not be able to register her youngest child in the program since he had special needs. She was pleased when the principal of Ergo Sum "offered to help… and find the most appropriate school" (Lisa, Ergo Sum, May 2007) for her younger son. Although this offer may be viewed as insignificant to the structural functioning of Edmonton's choice system, it may also be seen as representative of the role of the district in directing parents (both overtly and covertly) and students to various pathways, programs and schools.

District Involvement

Program placement and Closures

One of the most obvious ways the district influences parental choice is by choosing in which schools and along side which programs it situates alternative programs. Parents from the Carob Hill program reported on the role of the district in closing the program in 2002 and again in the reopening in 2004. After "a teacher was hired that wasn't suitable to the program" (Barb, Carob Hill, May 2007) and did not allow students to use her first name, the school and district leadership did not acknowledge that there was a problem, and parents began to pull their children out of the program. Jennifer recalled the experience of the first school Carob Hill was placed in during the reopening two years later:

> [School x] is a small school and you put another program in that school, and they got upset because they thought… like they were closing schools in the city with low enrolment so they were worried about another school. Here, this alternative program takes over the community school basically. And they didn't consult us and we were trying to communicate with them, and so there was some miscommunication that way and we're telling them no, this isn't going to work, but this is all you're gonna give us (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007).

When the program wasn't able to get the enrolment numbers it needed to open, the district moved to close it down. Carob Hill parents met with school trustees to indicate that they would rather move to the school that housed the home schooling program in the district.

> The trustees were going, why aren't you at [name of school] it seems to be a good fit? So they all of a sudden moved us to [name of school].
>
> *The district did?*
>
> The district did. We had four days to get in all the passports[2] from [school A] or wherever they were to [school B]. Four days was all we had, and we didn't do it because it was just too much of a ... Some of them got lost and some were late… Some dropped out because of distance (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007).

Carob Hill parents characterized the relationship with the board as a rocky one at best and an antagonistic one at worst. Jennifer said, "the public school system, the board, they hate [Carob Hill] and they always have… they just want people… give us your kids and shut up. Make your choice and go away" (Carob Hill, May 2007).

Although this story recounts the potentially detrimental effect the district can have in the functioning of a program, for Ergo Sum, the fastest growing alternative in Edmonton Public Schools, district decisions have positively impacted the program. Extra curricular Russian language classes are housed at an Ergo Sum school on the weekends. Mark and Lisa cited this as their primary mode of exposure to the program, which ultimately led to choosing it for their children. They reported not knowing any Russian

[2] Individual student registration forms

families who did not send their children to Ergo Sum. Additionally, contrary to district policy, one school in the city became solely an Ergo Sum site, since the mainstream program that shared the building was closed in September, 2007 due to low enrollment.

Lynn (Carob Hill) acknowledged the importance of program placement on student population and diversity saying, "Right now it is in a middle class, mainly Caucasian area. If we were situated in Mill Woods we might have more of a variety" (June 2007). This comment demonstrates that along with being a "field of forces" (Bellamy, 1994, p. 128) Edmonton's educational field is also a geographical field where distance and transportation are factors in parents' ability to access schools. In this light Brantlinger's (2003) suggestion that middle-class parents have the power to intentionally create inequities in the system may be somewhat limited since many of the structural elements that may lead to unequal access are implemented by policy makers and district officials.

The difference in the relationships between the respective programs and the district is likely the result of the capitals the district values. For example, the institutional cultural capital that achievement tests represent to the district are perceived very differently by Carob Hill than by Ergo Sum. Ergo Sum parents take pride in their program's high achievement results, whereas very few of the Carob Hill parents allow their children to write the tests (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007). When asked if that was a contentious issue between the program and the district, Jennifer (Carob Hill) answered, "That's a fight [our principal] is fighting now with them" (June 2007). Given the importance of these tests to the district, it is not surprising the EPS would be more supportive of Ergo Sum than Carob Hill. When asked to speculate about the reason for

the tension between Carob Hill and the district, Jennifer cited an increased workload for district officials.

> Edmonton Public doesn't really like us. They were not generous
>
> *Do you have any inkling as to why that might be?*
>
> Actually yeah [district official] said that when [Carob Hill] was up and running she had all these programs under her, but [Carob Hill] took up like 80% of her time
>
> *Why?*
>
> High parent involvement. It's meddling. It takes up their time, and parents are really highly involved.

District Transportation Policy

According to Maguire (2006), Edmonton parents most frequently cited transportation as the most influential factor in their choice, followed by school curriculum and program. Although some of these active mothers reported difficulties with transporting their children to and from school, other mothers drove long distances to their chosen program. Barb (Carob Hill) reported driving two hours every day and Sally (Ergo Sum) reported driving at least an hour a day since both of these mothers lived outside of the city. Many participants in this study mentioned difficulties with the district run transportation system. EPSB's current transportation policy limits bus rides to 60 minutes one way (Edmonton Public School Board Policy, EEA.BP, 2007), which according to Annie, "is way too long" (Ergo Sum, May 2007) and according to Lynn is "not realistic" and "non-functional" (Carob Hill, June, 2007).

> …the Child Study Centre, which took me 20 minutes to drive, give or take, 15-20 minutes, was over an hour bus drive for him to get to school. He'd have to get on the bus at our house at an ungodly early hour and then it was an hour on the bus to school, and for my particular child bussing wasn't feasible because he can't make

> that many transitions. He can't transition on a bus and off a bus you know four or five times a day. That's too many transitions. It was too long. He would have never been able to really function that well for that length of time (Lynn, Carob Hill, June 2007).

Transportation plays a particularly large role in the functioning of Carob Hill program since it is only available in one location in the city. As a result "some parents have had to drop out because it's just too far" (Lynn, Carob Hill, June 2007).

District Information, Misinformation, and Lack of Information

Information and advertising partially create the constraints that direct the focus of parents within school markets. Although, "research suggests that choice creates incentives for parents to gather information that may eventually reduce inequities if efforts are made to ensure easy access to the information" (Hamilton. and Guin, 2005, p. 47), there are several impediments to this, including the ability of parents to critically evaluate its limitations.

Advertising alternative programs is the district's domain. The first time one Ergo Sum mother heard of the program was when she saw it advertised on a bridge banner, which as Sally pointed out "you can't put …up any more" (Ergo Sum, May 2007). Since there is no city bylaw preventing this form of advertising, it can be assumed that this is a district policy; however because the district's advertising policy is not public, parents speculated as to how families were directed to their programs and why.

> I think that one of the reasons the behaviour kids did get dumped at Carob Hill was the public school system said, "Ah, just go on over there." And I do believe they've had a hand in being able to say go see Carob Hill knowing of course any person with a behaviour is going to want to be there, but I think they kind of laugh behind our backs, like we'll show them you know (Lynn, Carob Hill, June 2007).

One parent said that the first year Carob Hill was trying to reopen, the would-be principal (who was reportedly unsupportive of the program) "was actively telling parents [they] were closed" while the parent committee was "trying to get [their] numbers" and "had a big campaign going on" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, May 2007).

Another contentious issue arises in district description of programs. For example, the Ergo Sum program is listed on the EPSB website as an academic program, a description employed by all of the Ergo Sum participants in this study; however, one parent expounded upon this definition by saying that it wasn't the same as other academic programs. "It's not like an academic challenge program" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Under this construction, program elements such as information based learning and mandatory homework become synonymous with academic and in so doing, redefine the term 'academic' toward traditional pedagogy. Further, this definition promotes homework as the venue for educational advancement even though studies have indicated it as "a relatively weak pathway" to this end (Belfield and Levin, 2005, p. 72). This reconstruction of 'academic' was seen in comments from all of the Ergo Sum participants:

> ...A structural approach and it should be lots of homework, it should be strict and it, like we were looking for more advance academic preparation program (Lisa, Ergo Sum, June 2007).

Such manufacturing of language (and thus meaning) by the district may have the effect of building the public school system to implicitly direct parents in such a way as to easily satisfy 'accountability' requirements of the provincial government. For example, district valourizing of achievement results is consistent with the neo-liberal agenda of the Progressive Conservative provincial government. Without acknowledging the

controversy around normative or high-stakes testing as an accurate measurement of student knowledge, skills, and attitudes (AB curriculum), EPS requires principals to announce the results of Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) each year to their school's parent community. In this way PATs are legitimized as an important and accurate indication of school success so that parents are encouraged to conflate high test results with other school factors such as high SES, or "teaching to the test." Lisa indicated that while she herself did not consult achievement test results before choosing the Ergo Sum program for her children, she did "know the achievement results of [Ergo Sum] will really, really impact the decision of people because when you look at the school, first of all you open the results and see how you do. No matter what the other says, this is the fact. This is something that you can see" (Lisa, Ergo Sum, May, 2007). From this statement, we can see the difficulty with expecting parents to assess the limitations of information provided to them, as well as the problem with information being presented without an analysis to contextualize it. One parent from the Ergo Sum program relays how the traditional program prepares its students for these tests, in addition to excluding students not at grade level from accessing the program.

> [School x] tests from kindergarten. They do the Canadian Test of Basic Skills and they do the HLAT in addition to the PAT. So PATs are not a huge issue for [Ergo Sum] because our kids are so used to doing these types of tests and because they teach you know – they don't even blink like you know its just like it's 96% at the standard and you know something like depending on the grade level you know 50% at the excellent level for PATs. It's an enormous number (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Since Lynn's son's IQ is too high for 'opportunity funding' and too low for learning disabled coding, she became frustrated with district bureaucracy and sought other avenues for her son. Because she ultimately decided on Carob Hill for her son,

Lynn never took advantage of well intentioned offers by district staff to "fudge the results" of tests in order to access special needs funding and programming (Lynn, Carob Hill, May 2007). So, while parents engaged in policy gaming, so too did staff who, according to Lynn, "didn't want" her son writing them since he "brings their numbers down. So they were more than willing to quietly look the other way while I yanked him" (Lynn, Caron Hill, June 2007). This story indicates how achievement results are not necessarily an accurate representation of the program or its participants. It also demonstrates the way in which achievement results influence the way different schools, including alternative programs, are valued. As the district provides achievement result information to parents, it does not also provide information that offers a balanced perspective on how to interpret such information. By taking the position that alternative programs have been created in response to parent and community demand, which appears not to be the case (Taylor and Mackay, 2008), the district, like the government, positions itself to not be held accountable for parental decisions, even though it plays a profound role in influencing and directing them.

Lack of Information

The board necessarily decides what information should be generated and disseminated to the parent community. Complete information, such as, "promotion and graduation rates, achievement levels of entering students, …percentage of students generally admitted (Neild, 2005, p. 282), is notably absent from the district website, a typical phenomena in districts that promote school choice (Adnett & Davies, 2002; Hamilton & Guin, 2005; Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003).

Even if such information were available, it may not translate well from the theoretical to the lived experience of families. For example, although parents are required to sign a commitment form pledging to help their child with homework, some participants suggested that many parents entering the Ergo Sum program didn't "realize just how much parent commitment there is" and speculated that they "get tired of all the homework in grade 5 and 6" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007) and leave the program. Mark and Lisa indicated that the parents who leave the program due to "too much pressure, too much homework," have "no accent," (Mark & Lisa, Ergo Sum, June 2007) which indicates an area in need of further study: the differences in the way new Canadians and 'native' Canadians engage in Edmonton's school market.

Even when an Ergo Sum parent went directly to the district office looking for guidance to choose a traditional program, a district official gave her "some information, but he never mentioned [Ergo Sum] program." She added, "I don't know why. I always thought well that's kind of strange" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). It is difficult to speculate as to why the official did not tell Annie about the Ergo Sum program; however, this does point to a faulty information system.

Most Carob Hill participants believed that they needed to stay in the small building they were currently situated in since there wasn't enough EPS teaching staff that supports the premise of the program.

> Well what I've heard is many times if you go to two different sites, it becomes hard for [principal x] to oversee us anymore so it becomes that principal who would oversee us, and to convince a principal of this it's really difficult
>
> *You think there's not many staff and principals*
>
> They aren't out there. (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007)

The belief that the Carob Hill program has to stay small may be the result of a history of incompatible teachers or unsupportive principals. On the other hand, limiting the program's size helps to ensure Carob Hill parents retain the amount of control they currently have over the program. As a teacher and as an instructor of pre-service teachers, it has been my experience that there is no shortage of people who would be happy to teach in the Carob Hill program. Although this example doesn't point to the district as the proprietor of misinformation, it does indicate a lack of information available for parents even after they have committed to a program.

Some of these very active parents accepted their current program in part by default due to structural constraints, such as waiting lists and tuition costs and not through a careful weighing of costs and benefits. Participants also reported several structural impediments for 'other' parents trying to access their respective programs, such as changes in program placement, distance and the "non-functional" (Lynn, Carob Hill, June, 2007) district transportation policy. Such constraints had implications for student diversity within programs. Parents were able to describe several circumstances in which their program would not be a 'good fit' for 'other' parents' children, including having learning delays, or being an English language learner or refugee. Even within these relatively efficacious groups, one set of parents was "steered away" from a program as a result of their child having special needs (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99). Information also played a role in creating restrictions for parents in that some information was unavailable, leaving parents to speculate about the district's advertising policy and how students come to be directed to their program. Additionally, Edmonton Public Schools, as purveyor of information, reconstructed the term such as 'academic' and offered no means by which to

interpret the validity of achievement test results. Finally, Ergo Sum and Carob Hill appeared to have very different relationships with the district, which may be the result of differences in the way each program manages achievement tests and the value EPS places on the institutional cultural capital such exams represent. Because parents differentially embody the potentials and limitations of the field, investigating the resources very active parents draw on to navigate and moderate these objective structures may provide insight into power relations within Edmonton's quasi-market.

CAPITAL

> *Bourdieu maintains that far from being diffused throughout the social in the form of "capillaries," power is concentrated in definite institutional sectors and in given zones of social space: the field of power is precisely this arena where the "social energy" constitutive of forms of capital accumulates and where the relative value of diverse species of power is contested and adjudicated* (Wacquant, 2005, p. 44).

In their attempts to secure 'the best' education for their children, participants accessed a wide variety of capitals. Importantly, almost all of the work involved in accessing and utilizing capital, that is all of the work associated with school choice, was the responsibility of mothers rather than fathers. This is consistent with the findings of many critical feminist writers (Smith 1987; David et al. 1993; Reay, 1998; Andre-Bechely, 2005) and indicates, "women far more than men appear to be the agents of social reproduction" (Reay, 1998, p. 205).

Social Capital

Social capital is perhaps the most laborious of the capitals. In school quasi-markets where official information is lacking, social capital is employed in three forms

(Bellamy 1994): information channels, or what Ball (1990) calls 'hot knowledge,' or information attained from insiders or experts; obligations and expectations, for example car pooling rotations; and social norms, which strongly cohere "with the themes of social closure and class collectivism" (Ball, 2003, p.80). The defining characteristic of social capital is its usability.

Information Channels and Advice

The role of social capital in school choice extends well beyond the scope of schooling itself. Mothers reported that their very first choices after having their first baby, such as whether or not to breastfeed and which groups they joined, influenced their choice of school when their child was of age. Most of the participants from the Carob Hill program report being members of the breast-feeding proponent, group La Leche League, prior to choosing the program for their children. Others were reading books about attachment parenting, given to them by their friends, while their children were infants. Thus, when it came time for their children to go to school, this network and its parenting philosophy was consistent with alternative education like home-schooling or Carob Hill. Parents from both alternative programs reported seeking advice from other more experienced parents when they were shopping for schools. In an attempt to access 'inside information,' Annie talked to "everybody" she could, including educational experts, when she was looking at school. She spoke with "a cousin –in-law who's a teacher… friends who were teachers um [and] people [she] went to church with that were principals" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May, 2007). She was told not to make appointments and "just show up" when she was visiting schools so that she could "see the school as it is"

(Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Nellie (Ergo Sum) was warned by other parents not to enroll her daughter in a bilingual program since she was having speech problems and learned from her sister that teachers in a local private school were no better than public school teachers. Thus, these active parents accessed information through friends, acquaintances and family members.

Obligations and Expectations - Car-pooling and Transportation

According to Maguire (2006), transportation was the second most frequently cited reason for parents' inability to access their school of choice, yet for these active parents, transportation issues were relatively easily overcome. For Sally, transportation "wasn't an issue," and she was "willing to drive," but pointed out it was "a real commitment" to "drive her every day, there and back" (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Annie echoed this sentiment, although she was initially reluctant to drive long distances. In this way transportation was an issue, but one easily overcome since she "wasn't gonna take a job that wouldn't allow the flexibility because [she] wanted to be there when they woke up and got them to school" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Clearly, not all parents would be in a position to choose where and when they would work; thus, carpooling was common to mothers in both programs in order to share the work of transporting their children to and from school. Because Bonnie was retired, she was able to provide support to others by driving several children to school every morning. This reinforces Ribbens' (1993) findings that mothers maintain intricate social networks in order to share the labour of child care by rotating 'pick-ups' and 'drop-offs.'

Social Norms - Who Else Attends?

Social networks provide crucial information for parents investigating their schooling options, but they also direct parents to make choices irrespective of available information. Nellie said that the only reason their family chose Carob Hill was because the facilitator and principal that had worked with them when they were home schooling was moving to Carob Hill. She also indicated that knowing the parents who were trying to start Carob Hill again after its closure played a role in her decision to enroll her son at Carob Hill. Lynn found Carob Hill through a college friend and "just kind of tagged along with her in her school adventure" (Lynn, Carob Hill, June 2007).

Mark and Lisa chose Ergo Sum, through conversations with their friends at the Russian Canadian Association, whose children also attended Russian classes in a school that housed the Ergo Sum program. So, although Andre-Bechely (2005) concentrates on the role of printed discourse in the inequitable outcomes of school choice, citing Griffith and Smith's (2004) conception that each discourse contains "distinctive production processes, knowledge-producing sites and means of dissemination" (p. 16), only three of this study's participants indicated engaging in a meaningful way with printed materials, leaving seven who selected schools primarily based on the advice and actions of others. Bosetti (2004) reports "parents, whose network does not provide access to relevant and valuable information regarding options of school choice, are limited in their capacity to make informed choices" (p. 388). Clearly these parents' networks only provided information about particular programs and not about the array of options available. Here again, the primacy of agency in school markets may be somewhat limited. Although parents were agentic in their work to uncover specialized information and maintain

advantageous social networks, they can't be described as making informed decisions as much as they could of making cultural ones, informed by habitus and based on intuition and 'collective identity.' This 'shared identity,' different but present in both pedagogical alternatives, works to homogenize student population, create normative or collective bias and contributes to the social closure that reproduces class boundaries in school quasi-markets.

Cultural Capital

> *In cultural consumption, the main opposition, by overall capital value, is between the practices designated by their rarity as distinguished, those of the fractions richest in both economic and cultural capital, and the practices socially identified as vulgar because they are both easy and common* (Bourdieu 2006, p. 297).

Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu, is measured by its relative exceptionality and thus, works to distinguish, separate and rank individual and group practices. The practices these active parents engaged in were many, including visiting schools, pre-registration, policy gaming and engaging with text. All of these activities contributed to perhaps the most valuable and distinguished of the cultural capitals, confidence.

Objectified Cultural Capital

Engaging With Text

While text may not have been the most influential factor in parents' school choice, for some parents it did play a role. District disseminated pamphlets contained enough information to encourage both Lucy (Ergo Sum) and Sally (Ergo Sum) to call schools and set up appointments to visit before making their choices. While Jennifer readily admits, "I didn't do a lot of reading," she did see an advertisement in *Birth Issues*

magazine and was compelled to make arrangements to visit Carob Hill. Other parents, such as Kelly (Carob Hill) read more, but did so long before choosing to enroll in Carob Hill. Annie (Ergo Sum), with a grade ten education and Barb with a Master's Degree both reported substantial engagement with text. Annie began reading after she was disappointed in newly implemented practices at her local school. Additionally, other parents used her as an informational resource since "they knew [she] was – reading other stuff" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). She even began an email correspondence with the author of a book that supported a return to the basics and was thus invited to write an article for Organize for Quality Education, an Ontario-based group that supports a return to traditional pedagogy. Barb said, "I'm a heavy reader. I read everything Carob Hill ever suggested and I'm still reading." Only one parent reported researching provincial test results, however this engagement occurred only after she had enrolled her daughter in Ergo Sum. Although, overall, text wasn't most influential in parents' choice of program, they were aware of the importance of written policy.

Policy Gaming

Experienced parents from both programs were aware of the power of district protocol and engaged with their children's education at the policy level. As they participated in the field these parents developed a "feel for the game" and used this knowledge to their advantage (Jenkins, 1992, p. 70). Nellie said that she was looking for "something in writing looking at behaviour" when she was initially looking for a program for her children. After the closing and messy re-opening of the Carob Hill program, Jennifer said the parent society was "trying to get it in writing" that they would "always be connected… would always be under the principal of [the home schooling school]"

(June, 2007). Since Kelly had a number of years of experience home schooling her children before registering her youngest son at Carob Hill, she felt she had "an understanding of what has to be done in order that the administration at Alberta Education is happy with the results that they get in terms of their reporting" (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007). As more alternative programs developed in the district each learned from the previous and negotiated for greater control over their programs. Carob Hill differs from Ergo Sum in that their policy gaming with the district is ongoing, rather than only during the establishment of the program. When asked about the cramped quarters of their current building, Jennifer (Carob Hill) responded, "I'm hoping [our principal] would kick other people out, like home schooling …We don't want to move principals, so we would need to have a school all to ourselves" (June 2007). Jennifer did not seem to recognize the way in which such 'gaming' could negatively impact the education of 'others.' In this way, she supports Brantlinger's (2003) conclusion that many dominant mothers professed to ascribe to liberal philosophies of equity and justice, and in so doing, concealed even to themselves their own conservative, self-interests.

Embodied Cultural Capital

Confidence

> *It is there in middle-class mother's refusal to accept the school's verdict, in their persistence and their belief that they know better, in their feeling that they and their child are entitled to extra provision and in the sense of power and confidence they bring to exchanges with the teacher which results in teachers being persuaded to their point of view* (Reay, 2001, p. 273).

The embodied cultural capital of this study's participants was primarily expressed in their confidence to deal with the education system and their role in influencing it to the advantage of their children.

> Part of that is I do feel a sense of ownership in this because I've always been encouraged to feel a sense of ownership in that and I feel that I do have a stake in this education, that it's not out of my control (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

As new Canadians, Mark and Lisa did not embody the same cultural capital as the other participants in this study. When Mark and Lisa were asked how much influence they felt they had in the functioning of the Ergo Sum program they responded, "None. Nothing" (June, 2007).

> …parents' personal histories and their educational experiences influence their involvement in their children's schooling, particularly in their effectiveness in dealing with teachers. Such differences are rooted in social class, ethnicity and race. Where childrens' class and cultural background bears little resemblance to that of their teachers, connections between home and school may be minimal and tenuous (Reay, 2005, p. 26).

It is important to be attentive to the differences within groups who choose alternative programs and why such differences occur, since they are both symptomatic and constitutive of the unequal distribution of the capital that reproduces class-based barriers.

Pre-registration

Many of these active parents either attempted to pre-register their children long before school deadlines, or in the case of Carob Hill, actually worked for two years to re-open the program so their children could attend. Sally reports having her son pre-registered for a local charter school when he was three years old, but Lucy had a different experience when she attempted to register her children only months early at an Ergo Sum program:

> As soon as it turned to January I was aware that that's when they started taking application forms. Also, I actually went in even the fall before, and nobody wanted to talk to you. You know, like the schools were like don't worry about it (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Nellie decided to home school her children after going to a district kindergarten presentation when her first child was three years old, saying:

> I knew she was really trying to put up a good image for kindergarten throughout the district, but I was thinking, you know I can do even better than this … I could put together an even better kindergarten program than they had (Nellie, Carob Hill, May, 2007).

Nellie's confidence in her ability to provide a better quality Kindergarten program for her child reflects her access to cultural capital and sense of knowing how to find resources and present developmentally appropriate concepts to her child.

Visits

Making contact with teachers was a regular feature of maternal involvement across the sample. Cultural capital was key to all dimensions of the process of contacting and communicating with teachers. Both social and cultural capital played a crucial role, knowing how to approach, present, mount a case, maintain pressure and make an impact counted (Gewirtz et al., 1995).

For almost every mother in this study, decoding what they encountered at school visits was key in her decision making process. None of the mothers expressed any hesitation or concern about how to contact schools and access the information they required. In fact, when Annie was unsure of where or how to access information, she recalled going to the district office to speak to an official there: "I think I just walked in there. I found out who it was" (Ergo Sum, May 2007). They spoke matter of factly about calling various schools and asking to sit in classrooms where classes were being taught. Their expectations for accommodation and service were constrained only by the willingness of school staff. Nellie (Ergo Sum) described being able to talk to one teacher only on the phone and not in person because she was in the middle of teaching a class. Some parents took their children with them to visit the schools whereas others went

alone; however, there was an overall sense that school visits weighed heavily in parents' final decisions, since they were able to determine the school's habitus and evaluate whether or not it was a good match for their family. These mothers spoke not only to teachers, but also to principals to make their determinations. A few parents mentioned analyzing displays of student work to determine school habitus. After Annie visited a traditional school, at the behest of a district official, she interpreted what she saw: "It didn't seem as structured or as… It still had a lot of things on the wall that told me it was like [it was] child centered, that type of thing, and you get your word wall words" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Having first had her children enrolled in her neighbourhood school provided Annie with exposure to various teaching methods and strategies, as well as the opportunity to make determinations about such approaches. Thus, she knew "word wall words" were associated with balanced literacy, a pedagogical approach which blends both phonics and whole language, and she had decided that this teaching method was aligned with student led learning. As mothers relayed their experiences of jockeying for position within Edmonton Public schools, it was clear that simply following their natural inclinations, guided by their perceptions of entitlement served their interests well. When Carob Hill was initially unsuccessful in its reopening, parents were forced to find other suitable school accommodations for their children. Barb had already implemented a "back-up plan" in case Carob Hill didn't reopen.

> Yes, I didn't go to it, but I signed up for the [University Program] because Carob Hill wasn't sure it was going to run. They had tried the previous year. They needed a minimum number of 40 they had 39 and they wouldn't let them run so we didn't know if we'd have enough, so I signed up for both at the same time. [My son] as a Kindergarten person got in to the school. [My daughter] didn't immediately, but she did later (Barb, Carob Hill, May 2007).

According to reports of Carob Hill parents, who had their children attend the [school x – another project based alternative program in EPS] during the year Carob Hill was unable to re-open, school fees of $200.00 per month were charged, indicating that economic capital as well as cultural and social capital plays an important role in the functioning of Edmonton's school quasi-market.

Economic Capital

School Fees

Although education as a public good is theoretically to be provided 'free' to all children, district policy permits schools to charge fees over and above the cost of school supplies, lunch supervision and fieldtrips. Carob Hill charges additional school fees, and requires parents to provide the fees at the time of registration.

> Um, orientation. So all the cheques, they have to have all their society, like the $55 a month cheques, all the $200 cheques, all their field trip fees, all of that has to be done
>
> *What are the $55 fees?*
>
> [Carob Hill] always had this $55 a month fee because it goes toward the extra TA. Because there's so many hands, so much hands on learning you need more hands (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007).

The $200.00 cheques were implemented in the fall of 2007 as a method to ensure parents fulfill their mandatory volunteering hours. If parents fail to "put in their time" for a given month, the $200.00 will be cashed. There is no doubt that such measures affect the family population of the school by serving to limit access only to those with the economic capital to do so. Thus, granting programs the capacity to charge extra school fees through the district policy of site-based management creates an incremental privatization of

public schools. As another example, a university-based program that allows researchers to work directly with students, charges $200 per month to off-set 'extra' costs associated with the program. As Bonnie and Lynn (Carob Hill) observed, the fees associated with the university-based program limited program enrollment to "professional families" (June, 2007).

Supplementing

Common also to many of the parents in this study was the notion that what schools did not provide, they would. For some Ergo Sum parents, this led to the position that schools should focus only on academic subjects, making parents responsible for those subjects perceived as 'extras.' This is another form of privatization since only those with economic capital can provide a 'well-rounded' experience to their children. "Not only have changes in the nature of the state influenced the reforms on education, the reforms on education are themselves beginning to change the way we think about the role of the state and what we expect of it" (Woods et al., 1998, p. 46).

> I don't care about art, or about gym…I think art, gym, like you had in your papers, priorities and one of the things as facilities and extra-curricular program and in my opinion all this stuff is after-school. It's more of a hobby or something just for your development, but school is school. It's core subject (Lisa, Ergo Sum, June 2007).

Of course, this is a position available only to parents with the economic capital to supplement their children's personal development. Mothers from both programs indicated that their children were involved in extra curricular activities including music lessons and sports teams.

> I am fully prepared to provide the swimming lessons, the extra curricular. You know we're a middle class family that luckily enough have the opportunity to do

> the skating and the swimming so I wanted their time at school to be focused on academics (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

For some, the labour of choice, including volunteerism, legitimized the privileges they enjoyed, including their ability to moderate risk. One Carob Hill parent described her initial position regarding child-led learning:

> We weren't that worried about whether it worked or not because we knew we could pick up any slack at home (Barb, Carob Hill, May 2007).

When asked about her position on provincial achievement exams, Barb's cultural capital placed her in a similarly secure position:

> My husband and I both have Masters degrees so it's not like we're not educated or don't care about those kind of things. I think it's irrelevant to kids learning. When they get to the point when they want to do really well because they want to get into university or whatever then they will make those decisions, as long as we give them the basic foundation (Barb, Carob Hill, June 2007).

Many parents used phrases that invoked a sense of agency such as 'picking up the slack' or 'it's my responsibility,' and not coincidentally, these phrases were also euphemisms for accessing capital. Where parents lacked dominant cultural capital, they sought to have it instilled in their children through a particular program.

Committees

The time commitment associated with serving on parent committees is another way economic capital plays a role in the degree to which parents can influence policies and the functioning of the program their child attends. Since parents need to have the extra time and energy associated with the demands of committee work, this can prove to be a limiting factor for parents living in less comfortable conditions. Involvement in governing bodies is a practice of very active parents that enables them to influence program policies; thus, those with the additional resources required to serve on such

committees have the rare opportunity to impact the structure of provision. However, the degree of influence may be negligible:

> The only influence I suppose we've had is right like now we've been trying to get the Junior High program more prominent so we've been at the AGM advertising Junior High programs and having people from downtown talk um going to open houses and promoting I guess the marks. Trying to get interest in the Junior High program. Even with the interviews, you are part of the interview process and you're told to look at it like a parent, which you are, but ultimately the final decision is up to the principal (Marlaine, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Because Carob Hill parents don't want to exclude people who are not in an economic position to fulfill the hours, parents suggest drawing on social capital as a way to access the program.

> There has to be creative solutions so as long as that parent is making some sort of effort in making sure there's creative solutions so that they can be in the class more, or they have aunts or uncles or grandmas or grandpas, or they're doing a whole bunch outside and they're not you know (inaudible) the school, because we don't want to turn away people just because of that, but it also is a high parent involvement program (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007)

In addition to their two and a half weekly volunteer hours, per child, Carob Hill parents are required to join the parent society, which meets every three months.

Emotional Capital

Choice work involves utilizing many resources, most of which fall into mothers' domain, not the least of which is emotional capital. Ribbens (1993) alluded to the emotional capital required for school choice in describing mothers as experiencing a "dramatic shift overnight in their maternal responsibilities" (Ribbens, 1993, p. 59) and consequently the powerlessness they felt in their ability to control the lives of their children within the state bureaucracy. Overcoming intimidation to interact with school and district staff, working to re-open a closed program, not being able to access other

programs, and all the while remaining persistent, were common experiences for the active mothers involved in this study.

While Choosing

It's possible to view Mark and Lisa's decision to move away from their families and come to Canada as the first move in their ultimate choice to enroll their oldest daughter in Ergo Sum. When asked why they made the choice to come to Canada Lisa said "the criminal situation, inability to find a job and we didn't see any future in this country" (Ergo Sum, 2007). Given the amount of sacrifice these parents made, it is not at all surprising that they would pursue whatever educational avenues they could to ensure the success and well being of their children. However, without knowing the long-term outcomes for students of various programs, it is unknown whether or not the traditional pedagogy, familiar to these Russian parents, will provide their children with the greatest opportunities for success in Canada.

Carob Hill parents, who worked for two years to re-open the program despite what they view as a lack of cooperation from the district, also endured emotional pressures. When the district announced in late August that the program was going to re-open, parents found themselves scrambling to find teachers, which according to Barb led to beginning "with two teachers who didn't fit the program" (Carob Hill, June 2007).

Annie looked at several schools, both with and without appointments, went downtown to seek advice, and found the suggested school unacceptable. After exerting a good deal of energy into shopping for schools, Annie felt like giving up.

> Okay, that just confirms I'm not making any more appointments anywhere. And I walked, actually I had given up and I said to my husband, that's it, that's enough

> I've had enough school to school to school. I don't know where to go from here…My husband finally said, "Well, why don't you go look at the [Ergo Sum] program, and I said, "No, I've had enough… that's it I'm not lookin' any more" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

After much emotional turmoil and finally determining that Ergo Sum was the best program for her daughter (since literature that supports traditional learning presents that pedagogy as indisputably *the* best way to teach all children), Annie felt "almost sad" that she had initially enrolled her children in her community school. She characterized the choice process as "seriously difficult." Expecting parents to become educational experts reconstructs their role, as Annie suggested when she said, "well I had to stop and figure out what I wanted from the program." Lucy describes similar feelings since she grew up in an area without school choice and found it "very different" and a big "shock" that parents were expected to choose the school their children attended.

> I'm not convinced that ultimately… it's great that really we have the opportunity, but I wonder if it creates a lot of problems as well within Edmonton Public Schools that ...there's a lot of pressure to pick - you know had there been a school there, he would have probably just gone to the neighbourhood school (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

When asked to expand upon what she found most stressful in the choice process, Lucy said, "this is going to shape his…whole experience," and expressed worry that her children "know that they don't get a lot of things that other schools experience" (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007). If these parents, well endowed with resources, find the process of choosing a school challenging, less equipped parents may find it impossible.

Spousal Involvement

Within this sample, fathers' involvement in the choice process was negligible. This includes both the process of choosing as well as ongoing work related to school,

such as homework, volunteering and teacher meetings. Mark and Lisa were the only domestic couple involved in the interview process of this study. This may be a reflection of their confidence in explaining themselves in English and acting as translators for each other during the interview. Only Jennifer (Carob Hill) and Annie (Ergo Sum) even mentioned their husbands, and then it was only in an advisory or emotionally supportive capacity. Two of the nine active mothers in this study were single mothers, and one had considerable parenting support from her mother. Even where another relative was involved, it was also a woman.

Constant Choosing

For parents in both programs, Junior High represented further stress, because Carob Hill is exclusively an elementary program, and some of the Ergo Sum parents were looking to other programs for grade seven. In this light, Lucy described school choice as "a constant stress," while other parents relate their efforts to continually advocating for their preferences and the needs of their children. Although Nellie's son had been diagnosed with special learning needs, she felt "he should be allowed to have the chance to be in a normal high school class," and so pressured school personnel and shopped around until she found a school that would admit him. For these very active parents, choosing was not limited to the initial choice of where to enroll their children, but rather was an ongoing process as they attempted to influence and shape the operation of their programs. This was particularly so for Carob Hill parents.

> I think that we cannot restrict growth because of the inclusive nature of the program just like you said. I also understand that we don't want to loose our umbrella (inaudible) and if we loose that physical setting and that particular principal, then it's very difficult to find a principal who will support our particular

> program, and we could stay the same or lose it all together (Bonnie, Carob Hill, June 2007).

Getting Involved

All of the parents in this study were active participants in their children's education, although the degree to which parents were able to be involved varied. For Mark and Lisa, volunteering in their children's school was difficult due to language barriers; however, Lisa expressed concern when she said, "I know the oldest one is really upset that I'm not going in… He asked me about it." Again, this points to the ways in which school choice has reconstituted what is expected of parents. Even for parents who were born and raised in Alberta, overcoming the intimidation of speaking with school and district staff was a challenge. "I was always a shy person too, so I don't really feel comfortable going in, and of course you're talking to the principal and people from downtown" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). The fact that these mothers were able to overcome their initial inhibitions indicates that the choice habitus is one that can be developed given a certain foundation of capital.

> I know the first time I joined the board, which was probably quite intimidating because all of the principals of all the sites were at the meeting, and I was just like" What am I doing here?" But over a number of years you get know them, and (inaudible) and now it's like well, I have a question; I'll go and ask (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Where Lynn appeared to be quite comfortable standing up to "the system" due to her job as a social worker, it is very likely that her confidence was created through habitus while she watched her mother, Bonnie go through the process of advocating for her own children. Bonnie describes the difficulty she had in overcoming intimidation associated with her first child's schooling.

> Like with [my son] it was really difficult for me to stand up to the system at first. We're not trained that way. You go to school, you listen to the teacher (Bonnie, Carob Hill, May 2007).

Lynn demonstrated her awareness that not all parents are equally endowed in their ability to interact with school and district staff when she described her social work clients: "They don't know how to stand up to the school, so lots of times it does take someone else to come in." This undermines Ribbens' (1993) claim that in Western industrialized societies, choice policies center on the initial choice of school and do not extend to allow parental influence in other aspects of their child's experience while attending that school. It is important, however, to point out that only the Carob Hill parents reported feeling satisfied with the level of influence they had in their children's experiences at school.

Despite the efforts of these active parents in Ergo Sum, many of them indicated that they didn't necessarily feel they had much of an affect. Nellie wondered if her "input [was] really being listened to," and alluded to the important role of the district in determining the rules and regulations of the school choice system saying, "things move fast" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Despite feeling somewhat ineffectual, persistence is one thing the participants held in common.

Summary

This chapter addressed the following research questions:

- What informs or contributes to active parents' school choices?
- What resources do active parents draw on in Edmonton's quasi-market?
- How do active parents engage in the market?

Some of these very active parents were enrolled in programs that were not their first choice, in part due to structural constraints, such as waiting lists and tuition costs. Participants also reported several structural impediments for 'other' parents trying to access their respective programs, and some encountered such impediments themselves, including entrance criteria, program placement, and the district's transportation policy.

District involvement also influenced participants' choices through placement of extra-curricular Russian classes in EPS buildings that housed the Ergo Sum program. District disseminated information was not always accurate or available and thus created some restrictions regarding parents' abilities to access and accurately assess various elements of Edmonton's quasi-market, such as the meaning of 'academic' program, the validity of achievement tests and how students were directed to various programs. Parents of the Ergo Sum program reported happy relations with the district, whereas parents in the Carob Hill program described a contentious relationship, likely due to the fact that Carob Hill parents don't support the writing of achievement tests and thus, don't value the institutional cultural capital that is important to the district.

Parents utilized a variety of resources as a way of engaging in Edmonton's school quasi-market. This was overwhelmingly the work of mothers, since fathers were only very marginally if at all involved in the labour associated with school choice. The practices these active parents engaged in were many, including seeking 'inside' information, maintaining advantageous social networks, visiting schools, pre-registration, policy gaming, engaging with text and incurring the costs associated with program 'extras' or supplementing their child's education with extra curricular activities.

Mother's accumulation of social capital often began shortly after the birth of their first child in the form of networks developed by membership in various groups. This was particularly the case with Carob Hill mothers who reported joining a breast-feeding proponent group, which ultimately led them to their choice of school. Mothers across programs described utilizing their social capital to share the labour of transportation associated with school choice. Many participants were aware of the power of district protocol and engaged with their children's education at the policy level, in an attempt to secure their preferences by 'getting it in writing.' However, the ability of parents to involve themselves at this level varied.

Carob Hill parents not only felt they impacted their child's experience while in school, their reports indicated a sense of confidence related to their access to cultural capital. A 'new Canadian' couple did not embody the same cultural capital as other participants and so were least able to effectively engage in their children's educational experiences. It is imperative to be attentive to such differences within groups well endowed with resources since it is these differences, which construct inequities not only for parents within these groups, but more particularly for parents not within these groups.

Almost every Mother characterized her experiences throughout the choice process as 'emotionally taxing' and ongoing. For these parents, their initial choice of school was just the beginning of an ongoing labour associated with choice, including volunteering, engaging with school and district officials, and persevering through structural blocks, such as lack of information, intimidation and program closure. The fact that these mothers were able to overcome their initial inhibitions and re-open a closed program indicates that the choice habitus is one that can be developed given a certain foundation

of capital. These mothers could be described as agentic in their choice work, with particular victories being won by those who were able to re-open the Carob Hill program closed by the district.

Imperative to the unequal distribution and redistribution of social and cultural capital, that reproduces and reinforces the social relations of class, is the field of distinctions and identities created through educational choice (Ball 2003). Attempting to understand the dialectical relationship between habitus and field a closer investigation of these relative positions is required. By examining the connections between the field of school choice and the habitus and capitals of active parents, I aim to uncover how "macro-level patterns of social-class inequality and unequal distribution of cultural capital are linked to micro-level processes of pedagogy, evaluation and curriculum" (Swartz, 1997, p. 202).

CHAPTER 7 – ANALYSIS III
MIDDLE CLASS FACTIONS

This chapter seeks to clarify the oppositions and correlations between these 'traditional' and 'progressive' parents as well as explore the possibility for change in Edmonton's school quasi-market, by examining the way in which active parents' habitus and access to capitals intersect with the field to produce practices. Investigating these practices should help illuminate differences in the types of capitals each group hope to instill in their children through their chosen program. Such practices provide also provide insight into the potentials and limitations both for individual and collective agency to affect the objective structures of the quasi-market. Additionally, mothers from these groups assume membership on governing boards, and "steer away" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99), prospective families from their programs, which are practices that have implications for the relative positions they and 'other' parents occupy in the field of school choice.

World Views and Middle Class Factions

Apple (1992) contends that pedagogical struggles occur between "two factions of the middle class" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 78). Many authors have categorized these competing groups by occupation, such as public versus private (Dunleavy, 1980; Perkin, 1989), or managerial versus professional (Hanlon, 1998). The demographic information available to this study does not allow the positioning of parents into categories according to occupation; however, the occupations of the participants do suggest that all could claim membership in the middle class.

In order to clarify theoretical differences between the epistemological and ontological perspectives of each program and presumably their participants, it is worthwhile here to introduce other binaries constructed by McCarthy and Kirkpatrick (2005). Recognizing that binaries are not benign, and that they are limited in their capacity to capture real-life complexities and inconsistencies, the following section highlights fundamental differences in perceptions and values among this study's participants – for the sake of demonstrating consistency between philosophical positioning and preference of school program and thus the reproductive relationship between field and habitus. Ontology and epistemology are both constituting and symptomatic of habitus. What one believes about the nature of being and the nature of knowledge is the product of life-experiences in the field and is reenacted through habitus to impact upon and shape the field. Thus, ontological and epistemological binaries can be seen as habitus binaries. Additionally, habitus "generates the set of 'choices' constituting life-styles, which derive their meaning, i.e., their value, from their position in a system of oppositions and correlations" (Bourdieu 2006, p. 296). This binary analysis should not only clarify these oppositions and correlations, but also distinguish the differences in types of capital valued in each orientation. Since the programs in this study represent extreme ends of the pedagogical and ideological spectrum, delineations may be seen more clearly between the positioning of each group than would be possible with more moderate alternative programs.

Formal (bureaucratic) regulation or informal fluidity

Parental preferences for formal regulation varied according to which program they chose for their child. Not surprisingly, parents of the Ergo Sum program found the

idea of regulation compatible with their epistemological beliefs, which supports Brantlinger's (2003) finding that proponents of conservative pedagogy are "supportive of top-down control of accountability standards" (p. 61) The program's emphasis on normative testing and nightly homework is also consistent with this position and was cited by each Ergo Sum parent as a reason for sending their children to the program. One mother pointed out that she was attracted to the idea that the teaching methodology would be consistent across teaching staff in a pedagogical alternative because of the regulations laid out in the foundational documents of the program.

Another mother demonstrated a preference for formal regulation by seeking a 'public' school program, defining public as "still under control of elected officials" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). This definition of public rightly directs responsibility for the functioning of the education system back to those in positions to make policy, but interestingly does not include the notion of public as 'open to all.'

Every participant from the Ergo Sum program expressed an inclination toward formal regulation in pedagogy and made reference to 'proven methods,' although it appeared none had accessed any information that indicated the effectiveness of non-traditional pedagogy.

> So then I just started researching as to the philosophies of teaching and what was out there sort of compared to where I was at and looking at other studies and researched things that um were done with proven methods of teaching and finding out I guess what our school was doing compared to what the proven methods were and then researching as to what was out there school wise that would fall within the proven methods (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

> I wanted my children to have a good teaching style that is proven for all children to learn from (Nellie, Ergo Sum, 2007)

Without acknowledging at this point that the Ergo Sum program selects their students through admissions tests and therefore is *not* proven to work for all children, this parent seemed unaware of the contradictions in her recounting.

Some parents' narratives indicated a belief that learning occurred solely through the transmission of information which is impartial and unchanging, saying that once "they give you the information, you learn it" and "know that you have it correct" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Ignoring the potential messiness of multiple perspectives and varying values allows parents to feel that the world is a stable and neutral place with a single correct resolution. This ontology was evident in comments that suggested teacher-directed, rote learning, with an emphasis on normative testing was *the only way* to learn.

> When you're 4 or 5 years old, that's the only way you're going to learn it right, is this repetition? And you know, by testing you every Friday (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Swartz (1997) suggests the demand that curriculum and instruction be oriented toward the acquisition of 'usable' knowledge and skills is the result of middle class parents becoming frustrated by forms of instruction that do not aid students with little inherited cultural capital. It appears that parents of the Ergo Sum program are interested in the acquisition of institutional cultural capital in particular as well as a form of embodied cultural capital that demonstrates respect for authority.

Fluidity

The other side of the ontological and epistemological binary is uncovered in the comments of parents from Carob Hill. One mother reported "having a difficult time" with rules and authority (Nellie, Carob Hill, May 2007), while another indicated that she would like to see the program develop "a bit more structure" (Barb, Carob Hill, May

2007) These responses were typical of the Carob Hill respondents and thus indicate a kind of fluid perspective of parents in the program.

> Their minds are just exploding as far as creativeness goes and despite the fact that there's no formal reading being taught or writing or whatever, my daughter who's in grade two is devouring grade four novels all on her own, so things are happening. I think the tenets of the program are proving to be true. You know that if you let kids learn at their own pace, they will learn (Barb, Carob Hill, May 2007).

Ironically, while most of the parents reported having a great diversity of perspectives in the program, there were many points upon which they all agreed, even using the same language in their responses. This may be the result of the program's practice of attaining consensus before making decisions, or the 'intake process,' addressed later in the chapter.

If cultural capital is information capital that moves from the material to knowledge, skills, lifestyles and qualifications (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) Carob Hill parents appear to value an autonomous lifestyle, both for themselves and their children, and its correlating embodied capital, relatively free from authority.

Individualism vs. Communitarianism - Understandings of individuality as autonomous or connected

Another observable difference in parents' habitus is found in their discrepant beliefs regarding the respective importance of the individual and the community; however, in some respects, these differences are less distinct than in the areas previously discussed. Predictably, parents from the Carob Hill program put a great deal of weight in the notion of community. Jennifer reported that a sense of community weighed more heavily in her decision than pedagogy, and Lynn equated child-led pedagogy with the development of a sense of community:

> So we were also looking I think for a program that would address the emotional needs, the academic needs…We were looking for a sense of community so that she would feel like she belongs in that community, that she would feel like this is her place because that's her personality. She tends to you know want some ownership of her physical environment (Lynn, Carob Hill, May 2007).

For this family, social justice intersected with this pedagogy and community saying, "one of the things that really drew us to [Carob Hill] was the social justice element and certainly we now have a compassion club where kids have the opportunity to create and have exposure to people that may have differing challenges." To illustrate this perspective, three of the four parents interviewed from Carob Hill made reference to a cross-dressing student, with one saying, "That's the only place in the whole city, I swear to God, where that boy can go to school and feel whole" (Lynn, Carob Hill, June 2007).

> There's one kid in [Carob Hill], he's a little boy but dresses as a little girl and he's allowed to do that. We've made concessions that he feels uncomfortable in the boy's bathroom… well use the girls' bathroom. And it was explained logically to students who have issues with it (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007).

This focus on social justice represents the inculcation of social capital in the form of social norms, which is perhaps most clearly observed within specialized school programs, particularly religious and pedagogical alternatives.

This can be contrasted with Sally's position that "school has a social element to it, but that's not its main focus." Comments made by Lucy about her process of choosing the Ergo Sum program and her experiences in it echo this sentiment. While she did talk to other parents in the program before enrolling her children there, she said, "the discussions between say my husband and I and how we interpreted the information definitely counted for more." Classroom practices also privilege this individualistic perspective:

> Our classrooms don't wait for somebody because they haven't finished their homework, it is the parent's responsibility and we're moving on. And I think,

> haven't really seen it dealt with but I do believe that it simply wouldn't be tolerated, you know that sort of thing (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

However, Lucy also "struggled" with the diminished role of socialization in the Ergo Sum program, saying she didn't believe it was "a true example of what a snap shot of what our everyday life is" (May, 2007)

On the other side, Barb describes an aversion to the competition individualism promotes as a reason for choosing the Carob Hill program, saying, "…it becomes a competition therefore, with everybody being the same age and the same expectations. Trying to do the same things" (Barb, Carob Hill, May 2007). Although she purported to value the program for what it could provide socially, Barb ultimately reverted to an individualistic stance regarding the academic progress of her child saying, "We both have Master's degrees so whatever she doesn't get here, we can make up for at home" (May 2007). This comment reflects the abundance of cultural capital that Barb has access to and as a result her ability to mitigate against possible risks associated with the Carob Hill program. Contrary to the notion that those with greater cultural capital desire education that will provide the necessary skills to succeed financially in the market place, Barb never mentioned employment or the economy during the interview. Instead, her construction of the future indicated a desire for consistency in the maintenance of the cultural capital she and her husband already had by expressing a value for extended education. "I want my children to continue to want to learn" (Barb, Carob Hill, May 2007).

McCarthy and Kirkpatrick's (2005) binaries illuminated some similarities and differences between these two groups of parents. The desire for cultural capital is consistent in both orientations, yet there appears to be differences in the amount of

cultural capital available to each group. Some Carob Hill parents indicated a sense of security as a result of their cultural capital and sought to maintain their high level of cultural capital in their choice of alternative program. On the other hand, Ergo Sum parents may be interested in the emphasis on concrete 'knowledge' offered by traditional pedagogy because they believe it to be the best way to supplement their children's relatively weak inherited cultural capital (Swartz, 1997). Additionally, since cultural capital is information capital that becomes translated from the material to knowledge, skills, lifestyles and qualifications (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), there are also differences between groups in the lifestyles for which they sought to prepare their children. Carob Hill parents appear to value an autonomous lifestyle for their children, whereas Ergo Sum parents seem to desire an inculcation of a respect for authority in the lives of their children. Both of these lifestyle 'choices' can be seen as potentially reproducing different but, nonetheless, middle class boundaries. The autonomy associated with the Carob Hill program coalesces with professional occupations, and the authority represented in the Ergo Sum program presumably accustoms students to become authorities themselves. As parents choose programs, they also choose the social norms they want their children to adhere to.

Social norms, are created through social capital. Carob Hill supports the convention of 'serving the community' and Ergo Sum supports the convention of competition and individualism. Because parents can choose schools that contribute to the maintenance of their own high levels of capital, the cyclical relationship between habitus and the field remains firmly entrenched in the choice system.

Institutional Habitus: Us and the Other

Public School

Parents' epistemological and ontological positions were clarified in their perceptions of other forms of schooling. Supporting Brantlinger's (2003) finding, Ergo Sum parents and Carob Hill parents both accused the other of having control of the education system and of failing to do an adequate job.

> What we're doing now in our public – in our school systems it hasn't worked, and it's been consistently not working, and now everybody's kind of going hey you know that stuff we learned in the 70s and the 80, the touchy feely… You know it doesn't work, that whole you know exploring and learning thing. Guess what? - they take the path of least resistance. You know and that's human nature – we all do (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Sally equates any form of schooling other than traditional, with early models of child-centered learning. This illustrates her lack of exposure to current classroom practices and recent educational research (Gardner, 1999; Barell 2008; Bainbridge & Malicky 2000) as well as her alignment with the Ergo Sum program's epistemology.

Mark infers his desire for school to be the mode by which his children attain the embodied cultural capital that will connect power structures to their life trajectories which points to a belief that children should be prepared for "a place in a preexisting, hierarchically stratified post school life" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 61).

> I just think that public school is just way too, I don't know how to say it, lousy? What's a good word for it? Like relaxed or, like it's not really studying. It's not, school is for studying. Fun is after school. So these things should be completely separate and [Ergo Sum] was… I think it's going to be better for him to be prepared for real life (Mark, Ergo Sum, June 2007).

On the other hand, a Carob Hill mother is critical of the role schools play in the development of embodied cultural capital.

> Yeah and I think that concept of citizenship is one of the things that missing from the public school system. You know they teach them to be followers not leaders.

> They teach them to be soldiers, sit down to and you know learn what we tell you to learn and regurgitate it. Don't internalize anything other than follow directions and I don't think that's helpful. Then you get little cult members that drink Kool-aid you know because someone told them too (Lynn, Carob Hill, 2007).

Although, Lynn has had more exposure than most parents to various programs in the city due to her job as a social worker, this perception of 'the public school system' reveals a strong personal bias and provides support for findings which indicate parents make cultural rather than rational decisions when choosing schools for their children. Several parents from both programs utilized similar ideological beliefs to make determinations about the superiority of their program over others.

Public School Students

District policy to locate "regular" programs and alternative programs in the same school was likely intended as a way to mediate the segregation inherent in Edmonton's school choice scheme; However, in many sites Ergo Sum operates in the same building as other, often well aligned, alternative programs (such as the German bilingual and Logos Christian programs), maintaining similar norms across the school population. Where mainstream programs exist along side Ergo Sum, every parent noticed tension between students.

> In a school with both a mainstream and the [Ergo Sum] program there is a little bit, I would say of animosity…I hate to say it but maybe there's a little bit of an elitist uh mentality, even among the kids because they're different than the mainstream or better than the mainstream (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Another mother said that she didn't think students from the two tracks "played together" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007), and that "sometimes it might cause problems on the playground because the mainstream [weren't] as superior as the [Ergo Sum] kids." Annie

said her child noticed that mainstream kids who shared some of her classes "weren't as disciplined."

> So there are some differences, but it's not like I think they're treated any different. I think those kinds of kids, generally she wouldn't like associate with like other than if you had to work together (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Interestingly, all of the parents indicated that they were not responsible for their children's perceptions of mainstream students. Because the program situated parents and students as being intelligent, morally upright and hardworking, any perceived differences appeared as a natural effect of individual choices.

Individual bias, such as prejudice and stereotyping, was evident in some participant's reports regarding 'others;' however, far more frequently normative or collective bias (Tinney, 1983) played a significant role in their reasoning and perceptions. Normative bias is sanctified through the traditions of a school's institutional habitus and according to Brantlinger (2003) is the most difficult form of bias to recognize since it is infused in language and symbols. Just as its collective nature makes institutional habitus less fluid and more concrete than individual habitus, normative bias is less fluid and more concrete than individual bias. Parents have considerable influence in the customs and institutional habitus of a school, particularly parents who are also members of parent societies, or the program board. One mother believed that the bulk of parental influence lay in the "the culture of the school," (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007) and another mother relayed the role of these parents in maintaining the history and consistency of the program across sites. According to Thompson (1990), this "symbolization of unity" allows parents to "enclose the group with whom they identified while creating a less than –ordinary other" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 38). As such norms and biases are established and

entrenched over time, they become less visible, particularly to group members, and work to place some students in disadvantageous positions (Corson, 1992).

Institutional Habitus – Ergo Sum

> *The fundamental purpose of schools is compromised by demands that teachers act as parents, nurses, orderlies, social workers, or care-givers or by the belief that schools should function as social agencies or vehicles of change and reform* (EPSB, 1995, Request for Ergo Sum Alternative).

Alternative programs create educational spaces where like-minded people develop and maintain an institutional culture. In creating a homogeneous culture, such programs necessarily define themselves in opposition to an 'other.' When asked what parents in the Ergo Sum program had in common, Lucy responded:

> …A desire for the children to do well. There's a fairly high expectation, there's so a commitment that they will get their homework done, which is unlike some of, some mainstream… Behavioural expectations I would say are fairly across the board at that school (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

In response to this particular item, other parents made no direct comparison to mainstream programs, although their self-construction was one of superiority to an unnamed 'other.' Sally pointed out that "outstanding verbal skills and outstanding vocabulary" was "part of the Ergo Sum program" (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007); thus, the inferiority of other programs in this regard was inferred. In this way, normative bias becomes infused in language and symbols. Where parents were quick to dismiss their role in the development of their children's prejudices, the effect of their choice to attend a uniform educational environment was overlooked.

Institutional Habitus – Carob Hill

Similarly, Carob Hill parents constructed a collective identity that innately excluded others. However, this construction is more complex than that of Ergo Sum because of the inclusive philosophy of the program. Parents easily responded to the question, "What do you share with other families in the program?"

> …really Earthy people, who are in to organic food and really eat well. You know a lot of us don't vaccinate our kids because of the whole negative aspects. For example, a lot of people eat organic foods. Just very health oriented I guess, balanced I guess (Barb, Carob Hill, June 2007).

As will be explored later in the chapter, this construction is important in that the constraints of collective identity and normative bias guide membership and access to the program. The degree to which Carob Hill parents compared themselves directly with mainstream programs varied. Jennifer said, "If anything I didn't want him near the mainstream. I'm a snob in the opposite way. Like down at the school I had so many conversations where I was like, "Oh, I can't believe you just said that." So, while the program espouses democratic principles of inclusion and diversity, Carob Hill proves not to be immune to social closure.

Perceptions of Program Demographics

Although Carob Hill participants viewed the program as compassionate, just, and more open-minded than 'other' programs, many admitted a less than 'representative' racial composition, saying they had "a few First Nations" and "a few adopted kids" (Barb, Carob Hill, June 2007). In this case 'adopted' was used as a euphemism for 'non-European ancestry.' When confronted with the notion that the student population may not be demographically diverse, one mother declared, "I just like diversity and I mean it's a

diverse… even though demographically it isn't. The kids are diverse and that's who they're with. And the parents are diverse too. Like, we're weird" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007). Some mothers were careful to point out that they did recruit at the Pride Centre (a gay and lesbian organization), which may indicate some diversity:

> …that balance in the wide spectrum of the different Socio economic levels, different parenting styles, different spiritual styles. The range of people in Carob Hill is unbelievable so it takes a bit of time to find that balance and sort of find what works (Lynn, Carob Hill, June 2007).

The SES of the program's population was thought by most mothers to be more diverse than the program's racial composition, with a leaning towards lower income families. At times, parent reports were contradictory saying that while many of Carob Hill's families were low income, many were also 'stay at home moms,' which seems to suppose some degree of economic comfort. Participant perception regarding SES may not be accurate, however, since they themselves were middle class, but believed 'other' members of their program to be working-class. In fact, despite evidence to the contrary, many parents insisted on maintaining the perception that the program was indeed varied, even to the degree that one former home-schooling mother found the differing opinions she encountered to be "a bit hard" and needed to remind herself that "people are very different than [her]" (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007). Additionally, there was little evidence to suggest that Carob Hill parents took any responsibility for actively ensuring the program maintained an inclusive nature, with one parent saying, "There's probably more people from the lower income end, but I don't really know. Nobody's ever asked or questioned it. Nobody's really cared" (Barb, Carob Hill, June 2007).

PRACTICES

> *In Bourdieu's work, practices are conceived of as being "fundamentally improvisatory, the spinning out over time of the process of adjustment between the constraints, opportunities and demands of specific social field and the disposition of the habitus (Jenkins 1992, 179).*

There are many arguments articulating the theoretical benefits of parent participation in their children's education, including the notion that parents will better support teachers if they feel they have had input into school policy and practice, and teachers will produce better results working collaboratively with parents. Further, enhanced parent participation, in theory, creates opportunity for increased power from marginalized groups to influence decisions (Philips, 2005). While for some, these arguments are compelling, they don't take into account the way in which parents differentially embody the potentials and limitations of the field. Practices vary according to habitus and access to capital, which results in competition for influence over the field. Brantlinger (2003) suggests parental intervention in their children's education has effects for other children because educational differentiation (through tracking or alternative programs), implemented as a result of pressure from middle class parents has deleterious effects for those students relegated to the lower tracks. Thus, the practices of active parents' create the conditions of possibility of both field and habitus.

Access and Influence

Members of the Board, Parent Societies and "Just Parents"

The way and degree to which mothers were able to exert influence varied in both programs depending on the relative position they held in the program's governance. Carob Hill mothers reported feeling a great sense of influence over their children's education since they spend time directly in the classroom and make structural decisions

regarding the program (including curriculum interpretation, where to recruit new families, and writing policy statements about the program). When asked how much influence she had in her children's education, one Carob Hill mother acknowledged not only the privilege of her position on the board, but also outlines a well known axiom for being heard. "A lot because I'm on the board, and I'm there all the time and squeaky, squeaky, squeaky" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007).

Ergo Sum parents related their volunteerism to accessing social capital through the acquisition of 'inside' information and privileged rights and power. Ball (2003) terms this 'hot knowledge.'

> As a parent it is my responsibility to be active in my children's school so that I know what's going on at the school, so that I am well aware of what's happening and that you know and because I do have stake, I can address any issue. (Sally, Ergo Sum, May, 2007).

Annie (Ergo Sum) described developing a 'rapport' with school staff so that she would "have the right" to be listened to (May, 2007). While merely being on the parent society of the Ergo Sum program does not grant the power to have input into staff selection, being a member of the Alternative Program Society Board, does. One such mother, aware of the potential for ethical conflict warns, "any problem that you have within the classroom… you should separate yourself from the [Ergo Sum] board" (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May 2007). Parents on the board also have access to district personnel through regular meetings, so if they have issues or questions they can 'take it downtown' to higher authorities than most parents would ever have interactions with.

The practice of involving themselves at the board level and accessing district authorities suggest the choice habitus involves parents utilizing social capital to sway district and school staff to implement their preferences. Additionally, as choice habitus,

like all other habitus, develops through interactions in the field over time, parents who had previous experience with educational choice through their own education appeared better able to access power and influence in the field. For example, Lynn's active role in her son's schooling may be due to her mother's practices when dealing with her brother's education:

> I wouldn't let them label him BD because it was the school's problem. It was not his problem at this point in time. I was one of *those* mothers. He went to [School y] outreach and at one point they did let him back in school if I promised not to show up there again (Bonnie, Carob Hill, June 2007).

By demonstrating for her daughter how to be one of *those* mothers, Bonnie contributed directly to the development of Lynn's choice habitus. For Mark and Lisa, who didn't have the luxury of developing such a well suited habitus, and subsequently no position on the Ergo Sum Alternative Society Program Board (ESAPB), nor the parent society, exercising influence was considerably more difficult. When talking about an issue their daughter had with her classroom teacher, they described their efforts to be heard as "useless" (Mark & Lisa, Ergo Sum, June 2007). This reinforces Maclure and Walker's (1999) assertion that parents who speak little English report feeling that they are not listened to by school staff. Reay (2001) contends that "differentials in linguistic capital; the extent to which mothers had access to authoritative or authorized discourse," translates to differential reception to parent concerns on the part of teachers and principals (p. 273).

Interestingly, parents in the Ergo Sum for whom English was their first language, also felt as though they didn't have enough input into the functioning of the program. When asked how much influence she felt she had in the everyday functioning of the program Lucy responded, "very little, very little" (Ergo Sum, May 2007). She felt that

her involvement in the program through the parent society was limited to organizing the "fun lunch" and "the pumpkin run." She felt "offended" that she found out from a local newspaper that the district was planning to open two new sites in the coming fall (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May, 2007). Only members of the Ergo Sum board had access to that privileged information. Further, Nellie, a member of the Ergo Sum board said that despite a written agreement with the board indicating parents would have the opportunity for input into principal selection they were "not involved," even at the board level, although she believed they "should be" (May 2007). In this light, it appears that despite district rhetoric of parental involvement, only few are able to have any structural impact at a program, school, or district level. Carob Hill parents have been able to exercise significant influence over the structure of their program, including location, curriculum and student body. Although Nellie (Ergo Sum) was on the board that oversees the functioning of the Ergo Sum program across the district, she felt she had little impact on the functioning of the program. Perhaps this difference in level of parental control is two fold; the result of the size difference between programs and the embodied cultural capital or social norms of the parents of each program. From a district standpoint, it is much easier to accommodate the families of 40 students, than 400[3]. Additionally, Ergo Sum parents value respect for authority, whereas Carob Hill parents are "really highly involved," "meddling" and "vocal" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007).

School Gates and Parents as Gate Keepers

Programs that select students (or parents) valorize the middle-classes since they are often *perceived* as being more able than working class students (Gewirtz et al., 1995).

[3] This number is only an estimate since no data regarding Ergo Sum program enrollment are available.

This kind of 'cream-skimming' (Gorard, 2003) can have detrimental effects for students with special educational needs, or special emotional needs because schools that have more than their fair share of these students, or that have a reputation or stigma of being a vocational school, risk being undersubscribed and falling into 'spiral of decline' (Woods et al., 1998). Thus, the competition inherent to school choice schemes forces schools into positions where they must implement practices that create the appearance of exclusivity.

Ergo Sum

At the time that Ergo Sum was negotiating with the board, district officials raised concerns:

> Administration had several concerns regarding program access… there was a concern that students experiencing difficulties, those who exhibited behaviour problems and those who failed to do their homework might be either denied access or asked to leave. The administration is now satisfied that this will not be the case (Meeting, April 25, 1995).

When asked what restrictions families might face upon attempting entrance to the program parents provided a list of conditions:

> Well it's not for every child. That would be the only restriction. They work in a structured environment. If they had like attention deficit or sometimes if there's any learning disabilities it might not work (Nellie, Ergo Sum, May, 2007).

> …even kids coming from divorce where they can't cope and not like its their fault you might say, you know this might not be good for you right at this time if you're having these issues, settle them first and then come back so interviews I think are fine, but basically it's for any child (Annie, Ergo Sum, May, 2007).

Additionally, being a refugee or an English language learner was included as possible impediments to accessing the program. This exclusion preserves the appearance that access to the program is limited by the 'natural' circumstances of students, rather than inequitable policies. When asked about the number of 'at risk' children enrolled in the

Ergo Sum program, Sally did not connect her response with the stringent entrance requirements, "counseling out" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99) or the restrictions listed by other parents. In her opinion Ergo Sum doesn't "have a lot of at risk kids…because of the way it's delivered to them, because of the way it's done by rote" (Sally Ergo Sum, May 2007). Thus, pedagogy is seen as the reason for the homogeneity of the population and not more insidious administrative practices such as steering families away through "placement tests" (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007) and "counseling out" or "steering away" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99). However, one Ergo Sum program, located in the inner city, did have "a lot of at risk kids" and was soon to be "under review" since the program was perceived as being "watered down" (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

> It's you know a lot of at risk kids, a lot of at risk kids go to [school x]…so the school culture there is that way and I think that it was difficult to maintain a parent community there when the rest of them – and maintain those standards of - what I would call standards of excellence (Sally, Ergo Sum, May 2007).

Consequently, access to capital determines children's access to different options in Edmonton's school quasi-market.

As discussed in the last chapter, scrutinizing practices are largely the role of administration in the Ergo Sum program. At Carob Hill, parents fulfill this function. Carob Hill "emphasizes the value of diversity; inter-culturalism, inclusion and belonging for all," but its members also "agree with limiting the size of the program" (Carob Hill Website) Despite declarations from each of these mothers that they would like to see the program's philosophy grow, most didn't "want the program to get much bigger because if it gets too big you loose the community aspect" (Barb, Carob Hill, June 2007). One parent revealed, "My fear is that this select little group of people wants to keep their club, and I don't want to see that happen" (Carob Hill, June 2007). This reflects Brantlinger's

(2003) finding that the actions of parents with children enrolled in progressive programs ultimately work against their goals of inclusion.

> Their pedagogy contained the constructivist, problem-based, and student-centered aspects of progressive education, but the social class-homogenous nature of their enrollment precluded any realization of school as a model of a moral, inclusive and democratic community (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 64).

Carob Hill - Special Needs & Christians

Perhaps the most significant way choice policies have changed parent behaviour in Edmonton's quasi-market is seen where admissions criteria, school-based governance and parental involvement intersect. Many parents from Carob Hill were concerned about the program becoming "a dumping ground for kids that don't fit mainstream" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007). This is something of a legitimate concern considering that as the growth of the Ergo Sum program turns more and more children away, they will look for other schools to attend. Although no data regarding Ergo Sum selection or admission rates are available, parent reports indicate that counseling out and steering away are common practices of the program, thus it is reasonable to assume this practice will continue to occur. Worries that the integrity of the program's child-led focus would be negatively impacted by such trends led to parents declaring the program not "not necessarily the best fit" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June 2007) for families with special needs children.

> It's really extensive right now.
>
> *Getting in to the school?*
>
> Yeah.
>
> *So what goes on with it right now?*

> I wish I had the list. You have to come and have a visit with your child. You have to have attended an open house. We have to have a reflective document. A document that you fill out about how you feel about kids and values (Jennifer, Carob Hill, May 2007).

In lieu of an entrance exam Carob Hill parents interviewed and counseled prospective families as they saw fit. The requirement that students have 'independent learning skills became an entrance criterion that helped to limit the number of special needs students admitted to the program. In order to determine whether or not students were capable of directing their own learning, Carob Hill parents "rigorously" interviewed prospective families (Nellie, Carob Hill, May, 2007). "They're really trying to put limits on it because they're really trying to interview the families and the children before hand and know what they're getting before hand" (Bonnie, Carob Hill, June, 2007). Barb said, "It's not that we don't have some because we do, it's just that we're at maximum capacity for them" (Carob Hill, June, 2007). Special needs are not the only consideration for admittance to the Carob Hill program.

> Well there's an orientation and at an orientation you ask pretty pointed questions. I mean like for example if you're pretty heavily involved with Christianity and totally intolerant of gay people this isn't the program for you…We have a reflective document we have families fill out and it just asks questions, about education and thoughts and feelings and if any red flags come up then we ask more pointed questions but it's an inclusive program and if people have exclusive philosophies then they don't belong here (Barb, Carob Hill, June 2007).

Counseling Out & Parental Alignment

Like Ergo Sum, when families admitted to the program were later found to be unacceptable, they were "counseled out" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99).

> Our first year was a really difficult one because we had some really difficult kids in there and they had to find alternative programs for at least one or two… They didn't fit (Nellie, Carob Hill, May, 2007).

Another way parents are actively steered out of the program is through implementing more stringent volunteering requirements on the program's parents.

> At first we had the honours system. After a year it wasn't working so we upped the number of hours that people were required to volunteer from 4 to 7. This year we found out that 7 isn't working either because there are parents who just drop their kids off, but you don't ever see them. And there are some parents who have kids with special needs who got in that first year when we weren't as tight and weren't able to screen as well. You know those parents came and dropped their kids off and you know those kids really took away from the program (Barb, Carob Hill, June, 2007).

Carob Hill's parent society pro-actively selects parents whose philosophy is consistent with the program through directing their advertising campaigns to Birth Issues Magazine, the Pride Centre and one or two "select" kindergartens (Barb, Carob Hill, May, 2007).

Carob Hill parents were aware that the mandatory volunteer hours could greatly restrict the ability of some families to participate in the program and indicated that they were willing to make accommodations for those parents, as long as they "really understood the philosophy" (Kelly, Carob Hill, May 2007). Nellie indicated that interviewing parents was not about determining the suitability of the child to the program, but rather, the suitability of the parents. "You really have to have the parents aligned with the philosophy and that's why we interview is why are you sending your children to Carob Hill" (Nellie, Carob Hill, May 2007). Other parents also reiterated the importance of a match in habitus between home and school for the smooth functioning of the child-centered program, saying, "In order to do that you have to have children capable of leading their own learning, and you have to have children who have kind of been raised in that environment so they know what to do" (Bonnie, Carob Hill, June, 2007). So where the gate between students' family life and school life is significantly less pronounced in this alternative program, the gate between themselves and 'others' is more pronounced.

Of course, this is only the case because district policy allowing parents to govern access to the program encourages it.

> Right now they're not going to accept anybody else who needs a lot of support because there's so much… there's already enough and schools can say that you know we're already at capacity (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June, 2007).

Parents resisted the notion that the program restricted entrance or was selective in any way. Instead, one parent described doxic self-selection as a favourable practice saying, "people self –select and that's really what you want" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June, 2007). This was seen as a method by which to avoid the conundrum of placing the responsibility of limiting access on any one person from the Carob Hill program, although there was a good deal of evidence to suggest that parents did work collectively to limit access.

Summary

This chapter addressed the following research questions:

- Why do parents send their children to particular programs?
- What informs active parents' decisions to enroll their children in a particular pedagogical alternative?
- How do active parents view their role in their children's education?
- How do active parents engage in Edmonton's school quasi-market?

There were significant differences in how mothers viewed their roles in their children's education. Carob Hill mothers reported feeling a great sense of influence over their children's education because they spend time directly in the classroom and make structural decisions regarding the program, including curriculum interpretation, where to recruit new families, and writing policy statements about the program. On the other hand, even Ergo Sum mothers who held positions on the governing board reported feeling they had little impact in their children's lives at school. Even where written agreements

between Ergo Sum and EPSB were in place, it appeared that despite district rhetoric of parental involvement, only a few were able to have any structural impact at a program, school, or district level. This difference in level of parental control may be attributed to the difference in program sizes and as well as in the practices of parents associated with each program. Carob Hill parents describe themselves as "meddling" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June, 2007), which ultimately works to their advantage.

Differences in mothers' choices of programs can likely be attributed to their perceptions of risk and access to capital. Ergo Sum parents sought to secure the inheritance of cultural capital for their children through traditional pedagogy, and Carob Hill parents sought to reproduce their abundance of cultural capital. The inculcation of social norms was perhaps more influential in parents' decisions. This development of collective identities and institutional habitus creates a normative bias, which in turn produces social closure. Participants felt they had considerable influence in the customs and institutional habitus of a school, particularly parents who are also members of parent societies, or the program board. Thus it appears the reproductive relationship between habitus and field remains fixed in Edmonton's choice system, and points to active mothers as influential in reproducing class boundaries. As such norms and biases are established and entrenched over time, they become less visible, particularly to group members, and work to place some students in disadvantageous positions (Corson, 1992). Participant reports commonly contained contradictions, which they didn't recognize. Where parents were quick to dismiss their role in the development of their children's own prejudices, the effect of their choice to attend a uniform educational environment was overlooked.

CHAPTER 8 - DISCUSSION

> *The belief in free markets depends on unrealistic assumptions about decision-making and largely ignores the complex reality of culturally embedded social life* (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996, p.5)

This chapter summarizes eight key findings from chapters five, six and seven, examines their implications and offers suggestions for policy amendments. It ends with a brief discussion that revisits the limitations of the rational choice paradigm by synthesizing the possibilities to exercise agency in Edmonton's school quasi-market.

Key Findings

1. Parents Identify Themselves With Their Chosen School Program in Opposition to an 'Other.'

Parents choose schools, not based on a rational and objective weighing of all the information, but instead follow their instincts or practical sense, based on their own and their children's educational history, to make culturalist decisions (Bourdieu, 1990). Where previous research indicated that parents choose schools based largely on student population (Adnett & Davies, 2002), these active mothers followed the intuitions of their habitus and chose based more on parent population than on student body, as a way to maintain cultural familiarity between the school and the home. In this way, parents' choices reflected their own identity in relation to the ethos and status of their child's school, rather than on matching student needs to school program. This contrasts Gewirtz et al.'s (1995) finding that 'privileged or skilled choosers' engage in "child matching" (p. 28), which involves choosing a school which will "suit the particular proclivities, interests, aspirations and/ or personality of their child" (p. 28). In choosing schools based on their own identity, parents sought consistency between their family habitus and the

secondary habitus of their children. Where institutional habitus was not consistent with family habitus, parents removed their children in search of a better match, thus reproducing the relationship between a middle-class habitus and the educational field. This method of choosing has serious implications for maintaining or, possibly increasing, the unequal distribution of capital, because it increases population homogeneity and magnifies boundaries between 'us' and 'them.'

Not only did these parents identify themselves with their chosen program, they also identified themselves in opposition to an 'other.' The habitus of active parents indicated the embodiment of dominant educational structures, which translated into confidence in navigating their children's education, as well as in their construction of themselves as 'the good parent' in relation to a lesser 'other' parent. By identifying the quality of their parenting with their choice of program, parents constructed a notion of 'good parenting' as synonymous with being very active in their children's schooling. Identifying themselves with their educational program led to these active parents having entrenched interests in maintaining of the culture of the program.

Participants had considerable influence on the customs and institutional habitus of a school, particularly parents who are also members of parent societies or the program board. In addition to passing on the history and maintaining traditions associated with their programs, some parents actively worked to restrict 'other' parents from membership. The maintenance of Ergo Sum's collective identity through admissions tests, interviews and "counseling out" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99), is the responsibility of school staff. However, Carob Hill's identity was collectively maintained through the 'intake process' where parents "steered away" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99) families

they believed weren't a 'good fit,' such as special needs children and Christians. Ergo Sum parents easily described several conditions under which their program would not be a 'good fit' for some children, including learning delays, being a refugee or an English language learner, and having an unstable home life, such as going through a divorce. The fact that parents accepted such perceptions as a natural component of the choice process illuminates both the way in which school quasi-markets legitimize discriminatory practices in relation to race and social position as well as the way in which active mothers are influential in reproducing class boundaries. As such norms and biases are established and entrenched over time, they become less visible, particularly to group members. This possibly places some students in disadvantageous positions (Corson, 1992). The development of collective identities through institutional habitus creates a normative bias, which in turn produces social closure. Thus, the perceptions and practices of active parents' create the conditions of possibility of both field and habitus. One could view this fracture in the middle classes as advantageous to the district since it encourages interest-group politics and inhibits the possibility of parents working together to place demands on the district.

2. Active Parents Utilize a Wide Array of Capital to Secure Their Preferences

Parents perceived a hierarchy of schools and mentioned 'wanting something more for their child.' They utilized a variety of resources as a way of securing their preferences in Edmonton's school quasi-market. This was overwhelmingly the work of mothers since fathers were only very marginally, if at all, involved in the labour associated with school choice. The capitals these active parents accessed were many, including *social capital* in

the form of seeking 'inside' information, maintaining advantageous social networks, and the development of social norms; *embodied cultural capital,* such as visiting schools, interviewing school staff and pre-registration; *objectified cultural capital,* including policy gaming, engaging with text and citing district policy in an effort to legitimize discriminatory practices; *economic capital* for costs associated with program extras and supplementing their child's education with extra curricular activities and *emotional capital,* such as constantly choosing and using perseverance to overcome intimidation in an effort to be 'involved.'

Social Capital

Active mothers utilized all three forms of social capital including accessing information channels, to attain information from insiders or experts; sharing obligations and expectations, largely in the form of car-pooling rotations; and matching social norms.

Information Channels and Advice

Mothers' accumulation of social capital often began shortly after the birth of their first child in the form of networks developed by membership in various groups. This was particularly the case with Carob Hill mothers, who reported joining a breast-feeding proponent group, which ultimately led them to their choice of school. Clearly, these parents' prior networks provided information only about particular programs and not about the array of available options, and so led naturally to certain alternatives and not to others. Thus, these parents chose programs based on consistency with their own values and preferences, developed long before their children were school aged.

Parents from both alternative programs reported seeking advice from other, more experienced parents as well as experts when they were shopping for schools. Mothers spoke with friends and acquaintances who were teachers and principals. They received advice regarding the best way to authentically see a school in which they were considering enrolling their children, as well as direction about what types of programs to investigate, depending on their individual circumstances.

Obligations and Expectations - Car-pooling and Transportation

According to Maguire (2006), transportation was the second most frequently cited reason for parents' inability to access their school of choice; yet for these active parents, transportation issues were relatively easily overcome. Although some parents mentioned challenges involved with transportation, all had vehicles and time to take their children to and from school. Reinforcing Ribbens' (1993) finding, most participants maintained social networks to share the labour associated with choosing a school outside their own communities by sharing the driving their children to and from school. In order for children to attend Carob Hill, their parents must either have the economic capital to provide the two and half hours volunteer time per week, per child. Because Carob Hill parents don't want to exclude people who are not in an economic position to fulfill the hours, parents suggest drawing on social capital as a way to access the program. In addition to these volunteer hours, Carob Hill parents are required to join the parent society, which meets every three months.

Social Norms - Who Else Attends?

Social networks provide crucial information for parents investigating their schooling options, but they also direct parents to make choices irrespective of available information. Mothers reported choosing programs based on previous relationships with teachers and administrators, or knowing parents with children enrolled in the program. Other parents chose their program by following the educational choices of their close friends. Both Carob Hill and Ergo Sum parents said they had exposure to their chosen program prior to enrolling their children, because either their daycare or extra curricular courses were situated in the same building. As we've seen, choosing programs based on 'collective identities' leads to discriminatory practices.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1997) outlines three forms of cultural capital including objectified capital, in the form of engaging with text; embodied cultural capital, related to lifestyles, taste and demeanor; and institutionalized cultural capital, in the form of degrees and diplomas. Cultural capital is distinguished by its relative rarity.

Objectified Cultural Capital

Engaging With Text

Only three of this study's participants indicated engaging in a meaningful way with printed materials. Two Ergo Sum parents accessed district disseminated pamphlets, one of which also reported reading a book

that supported a return to the basics, and one Carob Hill parent reported reading everything on the program's reading list. Only one parent reported researching provincial test results, however, this engagement occurred only after she had enrolled her daughter in Ergo Sum. While overall, text wasn't most influential in their choice of program, parents were aware of the importance of written policy.

Policy Gaming

Experienced parents from both programs were aware of the power of district protocol, and thus they engaged with their children's education at the policy level. One Ergo Sum parent, concerned with potential bullying, sought a written policy regarding student behavior during her initial choice of school. After the re-opening of Carob Hill, parents wanted to 'get it writing' that they would always be administered by their current principal. Another Carob Hill parent, who formerly home-schooled her children, knew how to appease the provincial department of education in terms of reporting progress of the program, since the conventional measurement of achievement test results was not possible. Very few Carob Hill children write them. As more alternative programs developed in the district, each learned from the previous and negotiated for greater control over their programs (Taylor & Mackay, 2008). Carob Hill differs from Ergo Sum in that their policy gaming with the district is ongoing, rather than only during the establishment of the program. Parents were currently struggling with the district in terms of reporting the achievement

and progress of their students, and were also negotiating the growth of the program through getting their own building.

Additionally, parents cited EPS policy requiring parents to be 'supportive' of the tenets of the program (EPS website) as a way of legitimizing the discriminatory practices associated with restricting access to their program. The ability of parents to involve themselves at the policy level varied within and between groups.

Embodied Cultural Capital

Confidence

The embodied cultural capital of this study's participants was primarily expressed in their confidence to deal with the education system and their role in influencing it to the advantage of their children. None of the mothers expressed reluctance to interview school staff and administrators during the process of choosing a school. They spoke matter of factly about calling various schools and asking to sit in classrooms where classes were being taught. Their expectations for accommodation and service were only sometimes limited by the willingness of school staff. One Ergo Sum mother went to the district building to access information from district officials.

Pre-registration

Many of these active parents either attempted to pre-register their children long before school deadlines, or in the case of Carob Hill,

actually worked for two years to re-open the program so their children could attend. After attending a district presentation on Kindergarten programs, a Carob Hill mother decided to home-school her children.

Visits

For almost every mother in this study, decoding what she encountered in school visits was key in her decision making process. A few parents mentioned analyzing displays of student work to determine school habitus. There was an overall sense that school visits weighed heavily in final decisions, because they allowed parents to determine the school's habitus and thus evaluate whether or not it was a good match for their family. As mothers relayed their experiences of jockeying for position within Edmonton Public schools, it was clear that simply following their natural inclinations, guided by their perceptions of entitlement, served their interests well.

Institutionalized Cultural Capital

Only two parents from Carob Hill mentioned accessing institutionalized cultural capital. One mother reported feeling comfortable with any risk associated with the program since both she and her husband had Masters Degrees and, therefore, could 'pick up the slack at home.' Another mother mentioned her husband's philosophy degree and the fact that he was 'a thinker' when she referred to the way in which Carob Hill was compatible with his schooling experience.

Economic Capital

School Fees

District policy permits schools to charge fees over and above the cost of school supplies, lunch supervision and fieldtrips. Because of the labour associated with the project-based pedagogy, Carob Hill charges $55 per month to cover the costs of hiring an additional teacher's assistant. Additional costs include field trip fees and $200 per month for any parent who can't provide the mandatory one and half hours of volunteer time per child enrolled in the program, per week. There is no doubt that such measures affect the family population of the school by serving to limit access only to those with adequate economic capital, and that granting programs the capacity to charge extra school fees through the district policy of site-based management, creates an incremental privatization of public schools.

Supplementing

Common also to many of the parents in this study was the notion that what schools did not provide, they would. For some Ergo Sum parents, this led to the position that schools should focus only on academic subjects, making parents responsible for those subjects perceived as 'extras.' This is another form of privatization, because only those with economic capital can provide a 'well-rounded' experience for their children.

Committees

The time commitment associated with serving on parent committees is another way economic capital plays a role in the degree to which parents can

influence policies and the functioning of the program their child attends. Since parents need to have the extra time and energy associated with the demands of committee work, this can prove to be a limiting factor for parents living in less comfortable conditions. Involvement in governing bodies is a practice of very active parents that theoretically enables them to influence program policies; however, the degree of influence may be negligible. Many parents used phrases such as "picking up the slack" or "it's my responsibility" as euphemisms for accessing capital.

3. Active Parents Find Educational Choice 'Difficult'

Emotional Capital

Even for these active parents, with vast stores of capital, the choice process was characterized as 'difficult,' and 'stressful.' One Ergo Sum parent said, "There's a lot of pressure to pick" (Lucy, Ergo Sum, May, 2007). Based on participants' narratives, it appears that parents accessed emotional capital while choosing a school and then, after choosing, continued to access it by 'getting involved.' All of this was done with little spousal involvement. The initial choice of school was just the beginning of an ongoing labour associated with choice. Volunteering, engaging with school and district officials, and persevering through structural blocks such as lack of information, intimidation and program closure became part of these mothers' choice work. Some parents' reports reinforced Ribben's (1993) finding that when confronted with a dramatic shift in their parenting responsibilities associated with compulsory schooling, mothers felt

powerless in their ability to control the lives of their children within the state bureaucracy, which resulted in their willingness to undergo the toil of choice work.

While choosing, participants found decoding schools challenging and expressed anxiety about choosing the school that would impact their child's future. Carob Hill parents worked for two years to re-open the program, despite what they view as a lack of cooperation from the district, in order to "get back" that choice from the district (Jennifer, Ergo Sum, June, 2007). Expecting parents to become educational experts reconstructs their role according the rules of the quasi-market. For parents in both programs, Junior High represented further stress, since Carob Hill is exclusively an elementary program, and some of the Ergo Sum parents were looking to other programs for grade seven. In this light, some parents described school choice as 'a constant stress,' and other parents indicated their efforts to advocate continually for their preferences and the needs of their children.

Within this sample, fathers' involvement in the choice process was negligible, including both the process of choosing as well as the ongoing work related to school, such as homework, volunteering and teacher meetings. Only one father was involved in the interview for this study, and only two mothers mentioned their spouses; even then it was in a peripheral way, alluding to their advice or encouragement. All of the parents in this study were active participants in their children's education, although the degree to which parents were able to be involved varied, particularly for 'new Canadians.' Even for parents who were

born and raised in Alberta, overcoming the intimidation of speaking with school and district staff was a challenge. The fact that these mothers were able to overcome their initial inhibitions indicates that the choice habitus is one that can be developed given a certain foundation of capital.

4. Active Parents Have Varying Capacities for Influence

There were significant differences in how mothers viewed their roles in their children's education. Carob Hill mothers reported feeling a great sense of influence over their children's education because they spend time directly in the classroom and make structural decisions regarding the program, including curriculum interpretation, where to recruit new families, and writing policy statements about the program. As well, these mothers controlled access to the program by counseling out families with differing values and special needs and by requiring mandatory volunteerism.

On the other hand, even these Ergo Sum mothers who held positions on the governing board reported feeling they had little impact in their children's lives at school. Even where written agreements between Ergo Sum and EPSB were in place, such as the right of parents to have input into the selection of a principal, it appeared that despite district rhetoric of parental involvement, only a few were able to have any structural impact at a program, school, or district level. This difference in level of parental control may be attributed to the difference in program sizes, as well as in the practices of parents associated with each program. Carob Hill parents describe themselves as "meddling" (Jennifer, Carob Hill, June, 2007), which ultimately works to their advantage. Participants from both programs mentioned the inability or 'unwillingness' of 'other' parents to access these programs.

For new Canadians, Mark and Lisa, who didn't have the luxury of developing such a well-suited habitus, and subsequently no position on the Ergo Sum Alternative Society Program Board (ESAPB), or the parent society, exercising influence was considerably more difficult. Although they were active in their children's education, it took the form of maintaining their contractual obligation to the program to ensure their child maintains grade level standards in all subject areas. Contrasting with the reports of other participants, Mark and Lisa (Ergo Sum) described their efforts to be heard at school as "useless" (June, 2007). Where parents lacked dominant cultural capital, they sought to have it instilled in their children through a particular program.

5. Active Parents Value Capitals Differently

Differences in mothers' choices of programs can likely be attributed to their perceptions of risk and access to capital. Each group had very different perceptions regarding the relative advantages of their respective programs because each group sought to provide their children with different forms of capital. Both groups desired the inculcation of cultural capital; however, Ergo Sum parents placed greater value on institutional cultural capital, in that each participant mentioned the expectation that their children would attend university. Carob Hill parents on the other hand, either neglected to include university in their 'imagined futures' for their children, or spoke indifferently when prompted. This may be due in part to the fact that two of the four mothers I interviewed indicated that their children had special needs. These active parents also differed with regard to the type of embodied cultural capital they wished to instill in their children. The autonomy associated with the student-led pedagogy of the Carob Hill

program coalesces with professional occupations, and the authority represented in the teacher-led pedagogy of the Ergo Sum program presumably accustoms students to become authorities themselves. This differs from Belfield and Levin's (2005) finding that is based only on the opposition of working class and middle class families, where working-class parents emphasize "conformity, obedience, following rules and reluctance to challenge authority," and professional parents encourage their children "to challenge authority, negotiate and consider options" (Belfield & Levin, 2005, p. 74). Since the 'imagined futures' of Ergo Sum parents included their children attending university, it can be inferred that these students aren't being prepared for subjugation through working class jobs, but rather for the embodiment of the authority they themselves will become. Both groups chose their respective pedagogical programs to instill social capital in the form of social norms that were consistent with the embodied cultural capital these parents pursued.

6. Active Parents are Inconsistent

Mothers from both programs were unaware that their choice narratives contained inconsistencies and contradictions, which is consistent with Gewirtz et al.'s (1995) description of 'privileged or skilled choosers.' Carob Hill parents professed democratic values of inclusion and diversity, yet worked actively to restrict access to the program. Additionally, these same parents normalized steering special needs and at risk students away from the program by citing district and school policies that allowed for differences in educational outcomes. Ergo Sum mothers claimed to support traditional authoritative pedagogy, but complained about the program being too restrictive. Additionally, where

Ergo Sum parents were quick to dismiss their role in the development of their children's own prejudices against 'regular program' students, the effects of their choice to attend a uniform educational environment were overlooked.

7. Active Parents are Uninformed

Contrary to the rational-choice paradigm of school market proponents, parents generally did not seek out textual sources of information either in books or from the Internet. Instead, for these active parents, intuition, world-view or habitus, serendipity and word-of-mouth, weighed heavily in the decision- making. Parents are 'socialized' to behave in certain ways and make certain choices. In this light, suggestions to improve information systems in order to mitigate against structural inequities (Hamilton & Guin, 2005) become tenuous at best, since even these 'most active' parents do not seek a balanced 'intake' of information. Across programs, parents made unfounded speculations about 'regular' programs, and despite the promotion of standardized testing as a quality indicator of educational programming, parents reported that achievement results did not influence their choice of school.

8. The Role Of the District is Primary in Exacerbating Educational Inequality

The findings of this study support Brantlinger's (2003) claim that "in modern times, social divisions are solidified and officially sanctioned by legislated regulations and professional protocols" (p. 10). Through its authority to create policy, EPS potentially legitimates segregation and advantage, which enables parents to ignore or rationalize potential power imbalances.

Transportation

Many participants in this study mentioned difficulties with the district run transportation system. EPSB's current transportation policy limits bus rides to 60 minutes one way (Edmonton Public School Board Policy, EEA.BP, 2007), describing it as "way too long" (Annie, Ergo Sum, May 2007), "not realistic" and "non-functional" (Lynn, Carob Hill, June, 2007). Although these parents didn't rely on the district run transportation system, they did indicate that for 'others' distance and lack of 'functional' transportation was an impediment to accessing programs. Emery Dosdall, a previous superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools acknowledged the disparity created by this transportation policy:

> Transportation costs remain a challenge. We distribute subsidized bus passes to all students who rely on public transportation and we provide bus service to all elementary school students at a cost to parents. We know this can be an impediment for some in accessing our programs. We also know there will always be critics who suggest the students of poor or unmotivated parents may not have the same opportunities as those who come from higher-income families. But if we had waited until everything was equal we never would have begun (Dosdall, 2001, website).

Seven years later, the policy remains the same.

Program Placements

Participants mentioned the important role of program placement and the impact it had on both student population and program viability. Carob Hill parents reported that when the location of their program was changed by the district, some parents were forced to 'drop-out' due to the distance Ergo Sum parents reported the placement of extra-curricular Russian classes at an Ergo Sum site as

influential in their decision to attend the program. Carob Hill parents related the placement of their program to the lack of ethnic diversity in the student population.

Marketing

Parents' reports varied widely where program advertising was concerned. Two Ergo Sum parents learned about the program from a bridge banner, whereas all of the Carob Hill parents learned about the program either though a friend or from a birthing magazine. This indicates both district promotion of alternative programs varies and that Carob Hill parents have greater control of who accesses information regarding their program than do Ergo Sum parents.

Extra Costs

The School Act allows boards to charge fees for the purposes of "defraying all or a portion of any non-instructional costs that a) may be incurred by the board in offering the alternative program, and b) are in addition to the costs incurred by the board in providing its regular education program" (Alternative Programs Handbook, p. 5). Parents reported being charged $200 per month at the [Child Research Institute] when they chose this alternative after Carob Hill was closed. This clearly restricts program access to those with extra financial resources.

Admissions Criteria

The district website declares that alternative programs are open to all students, but notes that "some programs have stringent entrance requirements" (District Website). Since there is no formal policy outlining guidelines to be used to develop and employ entrance criteria, programs are able to enforce all manner of requirements. Testing for entrance to a program for 'normal' children, and rigorously interviewing parents before access to a democratically governed program is granted, seems to contradict the notion that alternative programs are open to all.

Lack of Transparency

More important than what information the district publicizes, is what information it doesn't publicize. Nowhere on the website or any related school or program links are intake processes and specific entrance requirements mentioned. This void serves the district's appearance of an impartial, equitable provider of our public good, yet also restricts parents' abilities to access and accurately assess various elements of Edmonton's quasi-market. There are several other important elements left unmentioned by the district.

Participants speculated about how students were directed to their program because the district marketing policy is not available. Decoding program descriptions is difficult because 'academic' is used to describe a variety of programs with very different requirements and philosophies. Also, because the district offers no demographic information and no way of interpreting

achievement test results, parents are left to take such results in absolute terms by not considering community SES and other influential factors in test outcomes.

Ball (1994), following Foucault suggests:

> The real political task is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent, and to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked so that we can fight them: (p. 27).

In this context, school quasi-markets may be seen as both symptomatic of and constituting broader social and political changes of neo-liberal governance, allowing the State to steer at a distance and remove itself from the responsibility to provide adequate resources to schools.

In the nexus of power between parents and the district, it is clear that the district maintains over-riding control. Although Carob Hill and Ergo Sum parent societies negotiated for more control over their programs than most other schools have, there was strong evidence that their perceptions and practices in the quasi-market were governed by district policies. Thus, mothers' love and concern for their children can be said to be "transmuted by the wider operations of the marketplace" (Reay, 2005, p. 36) into self-service and competition as they use unevenly distributed resources to ensure the educational success of their children,

Implications For Practice

Hierarchical ranking systems, which both allow and obligate individuals to compete for resource distribution is "contrary to the aims of a social reciprocity or communitarian ethic that is essential to a strong democracy" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 193, Barber, 1984; Greene, 1993; Harvey, 1996; Rawls, 1971; Young, 2000). Since

educational level determines who will participate in social and political life (Philips, 2005), every measure must be taken to guarantee children of all circumstances are provided an education that offers equal opportunities for social influence and long-term success. Callan's (1997) close investigation of common and separate schooling under pluralism provides a coherent argument in favour of common schools and outlines conditions under which certain types of separate schooling are reasonable within the political aims of our country. His definition of separate schooling is consistent with the alternative programs offered by Edmonton Public Schools. "A school is separate if it welcomes only members of the society who belong to groups that are distinguished by such criteria" (Callan, 1997, p. 164). The importance of the common school to the expansion of democracy implores us not to forgo it. Since it is unlikely that educational choice will be overturned in EPSB, it is imperative that it be effectively managed "in order to maximize its benefits and reduce associated risks" (Maguire, 2006, p. 10).

Just as structural elements can create obstacles that contribute to inequities in the quasi-market, they may also be constructively implemented in accordance with ethical principles in a way that moderates the potential for increased inequality. Callan (1997) suggests that common schools might even become a vehicle of separate education while retaining an overarching commitment to common education. EPS makes gestures toward this with its 'school within a school' policy and in its use of a common provincial curriculum; yet this is not enough. Testimony from participants illustrates significant social cleavages not only between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' groups, but also within alternative groups themselves. Some suggestions for improvement include:

1) Providing optional classes, rather than full day programs, for students with particular interests within a common setting, which would afford flexibility in educational programming within the district.
2) Admissions criteria should be centrally managed so there is more even distribution of students, which would ensure better program diversity, permit the control of student enrollments and moderate the need for school closures.
3) As a supporter of choice within a public good, the government must fund transportation so that all students have equal access to programs outside their catchment area.
4) In order to support the creation of more functional policies that confront systemic inequities, governments must fund research that uncovers oppressive social relations contributing to differences among "among racially, economically and linguistically diverse parents" (Andre-Bechely, 2005, p. 15).

There is a deficit of information regarding the effects of choice in Edmonton, but data alone are not enough. Publicizing research findings is the only way that the taxpayers in Alberta who don't have school aged children, as well as those who do, can be empowered to have a meaningful dialogue and effectively manage their education system.

CONCLUSION

One of the goals of this study was to uncover the limitations of rational choice theory as it applies to school choice by examining the limitations and potentials of agency in Edmonton's quasi-market. To this end, I chose to examine the perceptions and

practices of 'very active' parents. Over all, Carob Hill parents had far greater opportunities for control over their program and were able to re-open the program after it had been closed down; thus, these parents could be described as more agentic than Ergo Sum parents. There also were differences within these groups of active parents in terms of their ability to involve themselves, even at the school level. Although agency differentials between these parents may seem relatively small when compared with differences between 'haves' and 'have-nots,' these small differences in capital and access are precisely the means by which inequalities are reproduced.

Both groups were able to exercise agency in accessing the capital that allowed them to navigate and overcome several structural elements of the quasi-market, including the social capital to access and decode information and organize travel, sometimes over long distances; the cultural capital to overcome intimidation and engage with text; the economic capital to pay fees for program 'extras' and extra-curricular activities; and finally, the emotional capital to remain engaged and active in the children's education over long periods of time, with little support from their husbands. In this light, exercising agency appears to be directly connected to accessing capital in Edmonton's school quasi-market.

Even with these vast resources, active parents were not always able to overcome structural elements such as entrance criteria, waiting lists and school fees. Despite the fact that participants had access to 'inside information' through advice from district officials and personal networks, the information was partial, and so, limited even active parents in their capacity to be agentic. There was a significant amount of evidence to suggest that in their initial choosing, active parents were governed, not by a rational

weighing of information, but by the cultural preferences of their habitus. Also, parents reported feeling 'pressured to choose,' and by acquiescing, their identities as 'good parents,' active in their children's education, were constructed for them in relation to the school quasi-market. This is perhaps most revealing in demonstrating the limitations of agency, since parents are unwittingly embodying the field of choice at the level of personal and parental identity, being reconstructed, and in many ways, governed by structural influences.

Through my investigation of the perceptions and practices of active parents, I discovered some concrete ways that these parents are connected to the "ruling relations of the educational institution" (Andre-Bechely, 2005, p. 24). Participants made decisions, informed by the 'collective identity' of their habitus, to attend their respective programs, and once enrolled, worked to maintain that identity, thus contributing to the institutional habitus of the school and the accompanying normative or collective bias. Apart from the 'committee work,' which is common to both programs and contributes to the maintenance of school culture, Carob Hill parents actively worked to restrict access to their program, both by capping enrollment at 40 students and by "steering away" (Welner & Howe, 2005, p. 99) families they judge to be a poor 'fit.' I believe this level of parent control is unique in school choice schemes and thus serves as a measure for the way in which discriminatory practices become naturalized and legitimized in school markets that are only partially regulated. The behaviour of these active parents affects not only the school system as a whole, but the political and public climate as well. Allowing parents to control access to programs condones practices that contribute to the social closure that

reproduces class boundaries, and demonstrates the way in which the relationship between society and the state has changed. It is worth revisiting Woods et al.'s (1998) claim:

> Not only have changes in the nature of the state influenced the reforms on education, the reforms on education are themselves beginning to change the way we think about the role of the state and what we expect of it (p. 46).

Traditionally our public goods have helped to define us as a caring, cooperative people. 'Public' meant open to all and ensuring public good were provided 'free' of charge meant that people of all income levels had equal access to education and health care. As individuals work to support a system that erodes the provision of our public goods, through incremental privatization, small increases in control at the micro-level of parent involvement ultimately impact macro-level patterns of inequality and unequal distribution of capital. Liberal democracies must look to public education as a "potentially powerful instrument of social good,"(Callan, 1997, p. 163) and as such citizens must work aggressively for its protection and improvement; otherwise, Edmonton Public School's slogan, "success at school begins at home," will become increasingly true (EPSB Website).

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http://mountpleasant.epsb.ca/cogito.html

Ergo Sum Parent Handbook website
http://mountpleasant.epsb.ca/docs/cogitohandbook2003.doc

http://districtsite.epsb.ca/root/ShowProgramProfile.cfm?Program_ID=18

Caraway website
http://districtsite.epsb.ca/root/ShowProgramProfile.cfm?Program_ID=17

EPSB Cogito website
http://cogito.epsb.ca/commitment.html

EPSB District Website
districtsite.epsb.ca/root/philosophy.cfm

Heritage.Org website:
http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/EdNotes31.cfm

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Statistics Canada Website
http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/famil05a.htm

EPSB History Website
http://mun.ca/educ/facluty/vol1/delaney.html

APPENDIX I INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions:

1. What were your considerations when choosing this program for your child?
2. What kind of information did you seek when you were in the process of making your decision?
3. Did you investigate other alternative programs, your community school etc.?
4. What information was most useful to you in your decision-making?
5. What information, if any, led you to choose this program?
6. How would you characterize your experiences in the school system prior to choosing this program?

7. Did your child have input into this choice of school?
8. What is the role of schooling in your child's life?
9. How would you characterize other families in the program? What do you share? Where do you differ?
10. What are your thoughts and feelings about your experiences in this program so far?

11. How much choice do you feel you have in terms of which school your child attends?
12. How does this program differ from other programs available to your family?
13. Are there any restrictions for families who want to access this program?
14. How far do you currently travel to get to this school?
15. Why did you join the parent association?
16. Have you volunteered at other times in your life?
17. How much influence does the parent society have in the everyday functioning of the school?

APPENDIX II QUESTIONNAIRE

*** Note: All information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in any published work.**

Name of Parent: _____

Background information:

1. Mother/Stepmother's highest education level _____
2. **Father/Stepfather's highest educational level** _____
3. Mother/Stepmother's occupation _____
4. Father/stepfather's occupation _____
5. How have you been involved with your child's schooling in the past 3 years? In what ways (e.g., school council, volunteer, help with homework)? Please list the activity, dates, and approximate total hours involved.

Activity	**Dates**	**Total Hours**
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

High School Decision:

6. Did your family choose your child's designated school? (i.e., your residence falls within its boundaries) yes ____ no _____
7. Will your child be switching school districts? (e.g., public to Catholic) yes ___ no ___
8. How many school districts did you consider? _____
9. How many schools did you seriously consider? _____
10. Did you consider private schools? yes _____ no _____
11. Did you consider charter schools? yes _____ no _____

The Decision Process:

13. Please place an X beside the range of hours that best indicates the amount of time
that your family spent on each activity:

Range of Hours	*< 5*	*6 – 10*	*11 –15*	*>15*
Visiting schools (e.g., open houses)	___	___	___	___
Collecting and reading information about schools				
Collecting and reading information about instructional strategies and related educational research	___	___	___	___
Discussions outside of the family	___	___	___	___
Discussions within the family	___	___	___	___

14. Factors affecting final choice: Please pick the 5 most important to you and rank them in order of importance (1 is most important).

Location (proximity to your house)	_____
Size of school	_____
Facilities in school (e.g. sports, technology)	_____
Reputation of school	_____
Reputation of teachers and administrators	_____
Reputation of sports teams and coaches	_____
School focus (e.g., arts, academics, technology, sports)	_____
Availability of ESL, special needs programming	_____
Availability of AP or IB program	_____
Availability of particular sports program	_____
Diploma results	_____
Variety of clubs	_____
Variety of field trips or other co-curricular opportunities	_____
Relatives' recommendations	_____
Older siblings' recommendations	_____

Parent/s' experiences in Edmonton schools _____

Friends' recommendations _____

Promotional materials _____

Open houses _____

Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX III LETTER OF CONSENT

Jesse Mackay

jessemackay@shaw.ca
April 11, 2007.

Dear Sir or Madame:

You are invited to participate in a research project investigating the experiences of parents with children in an Edmonton Public Schools alternative program. As a participant in this study you will be asked to do an interview with the researcher Ms. Jesse Mackay. This data will be used in partial fulfillment of the Jesse Mackay's Master's of Education Degree from the University of Alberta. Additionally, the data may be used in academic conference presentations and published academic papers.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and will take approximately 45 minutes of your time. The interview will be recorded and the researcher will return transcripts to participants who request a copy (see check box below). Participation in this research is voluntary and you can opt out at any time without penalty and your data will be removed from the study.

By volunteering for this study, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experiences with the public school system and potentially offer valuable insights into the forms and effects of alternative programs within Edmonton Public Schools. You may decline to answer any questions presented during the study if you so wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential; indeed, your name will not be included or in any other way associated, with the data collected in the study. Data collected during this study will be retained for 5 years, in a secure place and then destroyed.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments related to this study please contact Jesse Mackay at 453-3205 or Alison Taylor 492-7608 in the Department of Policy Studies at the University of Alberta.

Sincerely,

Jesse Mackay

Statement of Consent

I, _____ (printed name of participant) consent to participate in an interview under the conditions outlined above.

_____ *(signature)*
_____ *(date)*

I would like a copy of the transcript returned to me. ( ) (check)

If you wish to receive the transcript, please include mailing address and email address below:

Mailing address: _____ Email address:
_____
_____
_____
_____